

**SOUTHERN REGION RECREATION  
RESOURCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING  
September 24-25, 2008**



The fourth meeting of the Southern Region Recreation Resource Advisory Committee (RRAC) officially convened at 3:15 pm on Wednesday, September 24, 2008 at the Hampton Inn in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Eight of the eleven members of the RRAC participated (6 present in the room, 2 by teleconference).

**RRAC members in attendance:** Billy Smith, Larry Mashburn, Morgan Sommerville, Ron Fox, Brett Paben, and Taylor Stein (Gail Wright and Bill Alexander by telephone).

**USFS attendees included:** Ann Christensen, Katie Donahue, Cheryl Chatham, and Caroline Mitchell.

**BLM attendees included:** Jinx Fox, Anthony Bobo, and Este Stifel.

Brett Paben, Chairman, welcomed the committee, explained the absence of some members and reviewed the meeting agenda. There were no changes or additions.

#### PROJECT PROPOSALS

#### **Bureau of Land Management Lower Potomac Field Station (Virginia)**

##### **Proposal 1: Meadowood Recreation Area**

Increase the monthly horse boarding fee at the Meadowood Recreation Area Horse Boarding Stables beginning November 1, 2008 to \$700/month/horse.

The committee had received correspondence and comments from members of the public regarding the proposal prior to the meeting.

Jinx Fox with BLM gave a quick overview on the facility and the proposal.

#### Discussion Points

- 41 horse stalls are occupied & leased through a contract agreement with BLM, a contractor and horse owners (5 additional stalls are leased to a therapeutic riding program)
- Indoor riding arena, access to 800 acres for riding, large pastures
- Beginning in November (new contract year), contract will be \$579 per horse plus \$1,000/month administrative costs and \$1,600/month for waste disposal. This works out to a cost of \$642/horse/month to BLM
- Recently, \$100,000 of safety fencing has been installed at the site
- An additional \$30,000 of maintenance is planned for this year at the stables
- There is a waiting list for boarders who want to lease space at Meadowood
- This is the last year of the current contract – not sure what future contracts will cost or what services will be provided. It will be advertised for new bid this fall
- When the current contract was set up, it allowed the contractor to establish the cost per animal each year. The contract allows for \$579/horse/stall to the contractor next year, plus the extra administration and waste disposal fee. Remainder will be used for improvements to the area
- Electricity, water, and trash fees have traditionally not been paid by the borders

- There is an erosion problem that needs to be mitigated on the property where the barn and stalls are situated
- Boarding fees do not go toward trail maintenance.
- Committee stated that it would be helpful if BLM better communicated the message of “your fee dollars are going to pay for ...” to the horse owners
- Boarders each have a contract with the contractor and have the stall as long as they pay the fee, even if the stall is not occupied.

#### PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr. Kenneth Kladiva attended the meeting as a user of the facility; he spoke to the Committee and provided each with handouts regarding the proposal. He had not seen enough data to support the increase. What data was available had been used with statements like “I [BLM] think.” Also, he stated that there is a more appropriate index than Consumer Price Index to be used to calculate inflation. In regards to aligning with the local market, he does not believe that the list provided was representative of similar facilities and amenities, and that there are other comparable stables in the area with lower prices.

Mr. Kladiva expressed his concerns that it is unclear why the increase is needed. He requests that BLM hold at \$625 for the remainder of the contract (1 year) 11/2009. This is the first year that costs will go over what the boarders are paying, and he feels that there should be money from previous years to cover the shortage. Mr. Kladiva had queried other boarders regarding the fee proposal – one replied that the fee increase would be okay if other services, such as blanketing and medicating, were provided. Another thought the prices should not be raised.

The RRAC asked Mr. Kladiva what benefits there were to boarding his horses at Meadowood. His answers included: locale, close to home; nice trails; nice meadows; golden facility that he would like to see preserved.

#### CONTINUATION OF MEADOWOOD DISCUSSION

- RRAC questioned the BLM representatives on ways they could better communicate the planned uses for the proposed fee increase. BLM plans to mail out letters, emails, and post information to bulletin boards clearly explaining use of fees and planned projects to enhance the property.
- RRAC questioned how a new contract would be advertised. Anyone can make a bid on the contract. Could include a concessionaire agreement or another contract similar to what is currently in place. When will a decision be made on future? Hopefully, mid-winter/early 2009. How before a bid will be put out? In a couple of months and will be advertised on [www.fedbiz.ops](http://www.fedbiz.ops), the government contract bid process.
- New operational contract or concessionaire agreement will go into effect in November 2009.
- Can't add additional services on to the current contract.
- RRAC addressed the BLM representatives stating that the RRAC had asked the Forest Service to address and clarify accounting and financial analysis in past proposals. This is the first BLM proposal to come before the RRAC. BLM should be prepared to answer the same questions as to why and how much of a fee is needed. Clear communication is a must.

Stein made a motion to recommend the proposal provided that BLM provide good information to the boarders as to where the fees are going. It was agreed that BLM

would: 1) post notices on the bulletin board, 2) send emails to boarders, 3) send a letter, and 4) host a meeting to provide information explaining how the money is being used at the site. Fox seconded. Motion recommended.

*Voting Outcome:*

*Category 1: 4 approved (1 member absent)*

*Category 2: All approved (1 by absentee)*

*Category 3: All approved (1 by absentee)*

RRAC requested that BLM report back to the RRAC with the results of the recommendation.

## **Ouachita National Forest**

### **Proposal 2: Iron Springs Recreation Area**

Eliminate fees at Iron Springs Recreation Area. Day-use of the area will remain the same. Camping will no longer be permitted. Use of the area is free.

#### Discussion Points

- This proposal was temporarily approved by the RRAC this summer. Vandalism of the fee tube has been a problem and cost to replace did not seem to make sense.
- There is very minimal camping use; site is great for day use, has hiking access
- Will maintenance stay same? Yes, the area is along a designated Scenic Byway
- Well traveled by the public/used by families, children, grandparents, etc

Sommerville made a motion to recommend. Stein seconded. Motion recommended.

*Voting Outcome:*

*Category 1: 4 approved (1 member absent)*

*Category 2: All approved (1 by absentee)*

*Category 3: All approved (1 by absentee)*

## **National Forests in Mississippi**

### **Proposal 3: Turkey Fork Recreation Area**

Implement tent camping fees at Turkey Fork Recreation Area. The requested fee is \$7/site/night.

#### Discussion Points

- Camping fee includes day use area amenities.
- Sites are walk-in sites; were requested by local users, groups, etc.
- There is a central water source for these sites

Fox made a motion to recommend. Stein seconded. Motion recommended.

*Voting Outcome:*

*Category 1: 4 approved (1 member absent)*

*Category 2: All approved (1 by absentee)*

*Category 3: All approved (1 by absentee)*

## Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest

### Proposal 4: Brasstown Bald Visitor Interpretive Center

Increase fee to \$4/vehicle for cars and \$3/motorcycle

#### Discussion Points

- RRAC clarified a typing error in paragraph #1 of the proposal i.e. \$4 per motorcycles should read \$3 per motorcycles. The Regional Fee Board had suggested it could be \$4 per motorcycle, but the Forest felt that \$3 was more appropriate for the area/more supported by visitors
- Expected visitation of motorcycles and cars? About the same as current use.
- Out of 21 comments recorded, 9 opposed. Higher number than other proposals.
- Length of stay? A couple of hours, if there is not a special event.
- Might make more sense to charge per person. However, it is harder to count the number of people in the vehicle rather than make the distinction of vehicle type. There is a tendency to charge per vehicle if the entry is unmanned. Per vehicle makes it easier to check compliance, by looking for the hangtag in each vehicle.
- On busy days, there is a gatehouse. Other times, it is self-service.
- How many visitors on an annual basis? Average weekend day is 700 cars (2000 passengers, 3 per car); typical weekday is 200 cars. 67,000 to 72,000.
- RRAC stated that the large van fee should only be charged if there are more than 6 people in the van.

Stein made a motion to recommend. Sommerville seconded. Motion recommended.

#### *Voting Outcome:*

*Category 1: 4 approved (1 member absent)*

*Category 2: All approved (1 by absentee)*

*Category 3: All approved (1 by absentee)*

## El Yunque National Forest

### Proposal 5: El Portal Rainforest Center, Puerto Rico

Increase the fee to \$4/per adult (16 and over), youth 16 and under 16 are admitted free, \$2/person for groups of 15 or more, an adult 62+ with pass = \$2.00/person

#### Discussion Points

- Fee has never been increased since 1996 when site was opened
- Since the annual pass is not increasing and youth are free of charge, perhaps this will encourage more local use

Sommerville made a motion to recommend. Fox seconded. Motion recommended.

#### *Voting Outcome:*

*Category 1: 4 approved (1 member absent)*

*Category 2: All approved (1 by absentee)*

*Category 3: All approved (1 by absentee)*

## **Ozark-St. Francis National Forests**

### **Proposal 6: Blanchard Springs Caverns**

Increase fees at Blanchard Springs Caverns for the Dripstone and Discovery Tours.

#### Discussion Points

- Does the proposal Include O&M costs from Wild Cave tour? No
- Public input seems to be 50% Supportive and 50% Opposing
- Local use vs. outside use
- What is the capacity? It is a timed entry
- Doubling of season pass is a concern
- Number of youth visiting (what percentage of visitors)?
- If visitation is down, why increase fee?

At this time, the Forest Service withdrew the proposal to clarify questions of the RRAC. RRAC agreed to re-visit another proposal in the fall of 2009 if the Forest will do additional public involvement and provide more information.

## **George Washington and Jefferson National Forests, Virginia**

### **Proposal 7: South Pedlar ATV Trail System**

Change the fee on South Pedlar All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) area from a “per vehicle” fee to a “per operator” fee and (2) add a 3-day special recreation permit fee option for the South Pedlar ATV Trail and the Taskers Gap/Peters Mill Run OHV/ATV Trail system. The proposed fee is a 1-day permit for \$5/operator, a 3-day permit for \$12/operator, and an annual permit for \$30/operator which would include the same fee for mountain bike use on the trail. If approved, fee changes will be implemented April 1, 2009.

This proposal was reviewed at the last RRAC meeting; however, the Forest Service withdrew this proposal to conduct further public involvement specifically with mountain bikers. The Forest made numerous contacts to the mountain bike community in 2008 and received no opposition to the fee and the proposal to include a charge for mountain bike use. There is very little (if any) mountain bike use on the trail even though it is an approved use.

#### Discussion Points

- Charging mountain bikers vs hikers
- Will the fee apply to mountain bikes? Yes, it would.
- What is prohibited on the trail? Street legal off-highway vehicles, saddle, pack, and stock animals are not permitted.
- Request that the Forest Service Regional Office look at consistency as it relates to charging for mountain bike use on multi-use trails and stand alone mountain bike trails.
- Concerns with charging mtn bikers on ATV/OHV trails on one or more forests in the Region, but not in Florida
- Sommerville: In reviewing the proposal, we as a Committee should not be sidetracked by the mountain bike policy or philosophy; need to have that discussion in conjunction with the pricing policy that the Forest Service asked the Committee to review, discuss, advise on, etc.

- Cost recovery on this proposal is less than on other ATV trails that the RRAC has looked at in the past. More about process (how to charge ie per operator vs. per vehicle) than cost recovery.
- The proposal would make this one consistent with other ATV trail on forest (3 day).

Sommerville made a motion to recommend. Fox seconded. Motion recommended.

*Voting Outcome:*

*Category 1: 4 approved (1 member absent)*

*Category 2: All approved (1 by absentee)*

*Category 3: All approved (1 by absentee)*

Telephone attendees Bill and Gail left the meeting. Adjourn for the day at 6:45 pm.



The fourth meeting of the Southern Region Recreation Resource Advisory Committee (RRAC) reconvened at 8:00 am on Thursday, September 25, 2008 at the Hampton Inn in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Six of the eleven members of the RRAC participated. Official business was not conducted and no proposals were discussed. The agenda focused on review and discussion of the draft Southern Region Fee Pricing Guidance.

**RRAC members in attendance:** Billy Smith, Larry Mashburn, Morgan Sommerville, Ron Fox, Brett Paben, and Taylor Stein.

**USFS attendees included:** Ann Christensen, Katie Donahue, Cheryl Chatham, and Caroline Mitchell.

Chairperson Paben called the meeting to order.

Ann Christensen (Director of Recreation, Wilderness, Heritage & Volunteer Programs for the Forest Service Southern Region) reviewed the agenda. There were no agenda additions or changes from the Committee. The focus for the day was to review the draft Regional Fee Pricing Guidance, and to obtain Committee views and advice.

The purpose of the pricing guidance is to help set the context for establishing recreation fees for National Forests and Grasslands in the Southern Region of the US Forest Service. A key goal is to promote a shared understanding of factors to consider when proposing recreation fees, and when to retain free use at recreation areas.

Key discussion points included pricing factors, fee variability across the region, fee consistency expectations, predicted fee ranges, typical fee levels, pricing guidance for common fee sites, cost recovery spectrum, campground development levels, etc.

Katie Donahue, National Fee Program Manager, informed the group that the Western Slope No Fee Coalition released a white paper the day before regarding RRACs across the nation. Chairman Paben has received a copy of the paper via email and has forwarded it to the member's inboxes.

The RRAC discussed Public Involvement tactics, information and the—sometimes--lack of comments.

- Scale of reaction to proposed fees – in users' mind. Doesn't rate compared to other economic and national things going on.
- RRAC members themselves have contacted their constituents and had very little response or reaction to proposed fee changes.
- Forest Service should consider comment cards/posting at the site. Might make it easier to submit and receive comments from the public.
- There are numerous proposals that don't make it to the RRAC, some get rejected by the FS Regional Fee Board or Regional Program leaders before the proposal ever gets fully developed. The Region is focused on self-policing as it relates to fee proposals and has strong criteria regarding acceptable fee proposals. Many recreation areas remain fee free.

*Break for lunch at 12:15pm.*

#### GENERAL COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Pre-work for meetings: Does the RRAC receive it soon enough? Yes, but if there's a large number of proposals in the future, members will need more time.

Is the communication/information balance okay during the time the Committee is not meeting? Yes.

#### COMMITTEE TERMS

Number of years to serve, as voted on at the first meeting:

Alexander – 3	Paben – 3	Huskins - 3
Sommerville – 3	Morales - 2	Smith - 2
Stein – 2	Mashburn – 2	Wright -2
Terrell – 2		
Fox – 2		

If Committee member would like to re-apply for the Committee, please fill out an application and return to Caroline Mitchell. The Forest Service Region has initiated an assertive public notification process to solicit additional information and applications from the public. New members will take office in the fall of 2009. Existing members will serve until February 16, 2009.

#### NEXT MEETING DATES

Spring meeting will most likely be in Atlanta, Georgia the week of February 9.

Fall meeting: Alabama has offered to host. Other possible meeting locations are: Nashville, TN; Charlotte, NC; or Arkansas. A cost comparison will be conducted before a decision is made regarding location. Field trip may be scheduled every other year, depending on what information needs the Committee has. Fall meeting will tentatively be scheduled the week of September 14, 2009.

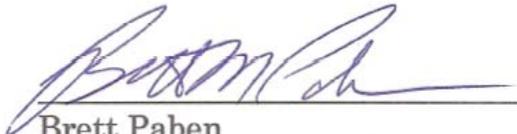
WRAP-UP

- Notes will be sent to Paben, who will forward on for Committee review.
- Recommendations will go to Forest Service Regional Forester for consideration and potential approval.

Stein made a motion to adjourn. Sommerville seconded. Meeting adjourned at 3:50 pm.



I certify that each member of the Southern Region Recreation Resource Advisory Committee has been given an opportunity to review and comment on the September 2008 meeting notes; and I officially approve the above notes.

  
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Brett Paben  
Southern Region RRAC Chairperson

10-22-08  
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DATE