

RANGE MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

P.O. Box 944246
SACRAMENTO, CA 94244-2460
Website: www.bof.fire.ca.gov
(916) 653-8007



RANGE MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, April 27, 2021

Teleconference

RMAC Members Present

Chair Marc Horney
Vice Chair Rich Ross
Taylor Hagata
Bart Cremers
Andréé Soares
Lance Criley
Billie Roney
Don Watson
Kristen Murphy
Katie Delbar, ex officio member

RMAC Members Absent

John Van Duyn
Sheryl Landrum

RMAC Staff

Edith Hannigan, Land Use Planning Program Manager
Deniele Cade, Licensing Analyst
Kristina Wolf, Environmental Scientist

Department Staff

None

The Board's mission is to lead California in developing policies and programs that serve the public interest in environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable management of forest and rangelands, and a fire protection system that protects and serves the people of the state.

Items appear in the order they were presented on the agenda.

1) Staff/Chairman's Report

a) Membership Updates

Chair Horney and Vice-chair Rich Ross were elected to these positions for an additional year-long term at the March 25th RMAC meeting, and Marc Horney was nominated and appointed for an additional four-year term on RMAC. and this was noticed at the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection's April meeting. Note: four positions will expire in January 2022, so we will want to address this at the end of 2021.

2) Approval of March 2021 Meeting Minutes

Chair Horney moved to accept the meeting minutes. Member Hagata seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote for Approval of March 25, 2021 Meeting Minutes:

| | |
|----------|------------------------|
| Horney | Aye |
| Hagata | Aye |
| Ross | Absent at time of vote |
| Cremers | Aye |
| Soares | Aye |
| Van Duyn | Absent |
| Roney | Aye |
| Watson | Absent at time of vote |
| Landrum | Absent |
| Criley | Aye |
| Murphy | Aye |

The motion carries with 7 ayes and 3 absences at the time of the vote. The meeting minutes will be posted to the RMAC webpage.

3) Grazing on National Forestlands in California – Leigh Sevy, USFS Region 5

Leigh gave a short presentation on grazing in the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) National Forests, and the process for staffing positions that require rangeland management experience.

What is happening on USFS grazing lands is that budgets are static, and the dollars do not go far, especially as the funds are the same on a yearly basis. She was the last range management person on Tahoe National Forest, and that ended about five years ago. El Dorado National Forest is in a similar situation, and Sequoia may go that way as well. In the late 1980's there was a wave of rangeland conservationists saturating the field, and schools have been unable to keep up with the need and demand, so the Range Management Specialist Series requirements are not being met. Many range conservationists have also begun retiring, and they are not being replaced. Their replacements do NOT need to be certified range managers, but there are requirements for qualifications in each range position, but that is just not happening because there are not enough candidates. They are looking at options to train folks internally or externally with e.g., Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.C. Cooperative Extension (UCCE) and other universities within the State, the Natural Resources Conservation

Service (NRCS), in order to fill that gap. This is a nation-wide problem, and while it was foreseeable, it has not yet been adequately addressed.

National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) also hasn't been happening on their vacant allotments, and if the permittee leaves and doesn't give it to someone else, it is hard to then get the (NEPA report completed on an allotment, so that is another factor contributing to less grazing on USFS lands. Some allotments have been closed, although that's a rarity, and that has been due to a lack of interest, or the type of allotment not being "worth it" for graziers (e.g., a small, low productivity area).

Question from Member Soares: Requested background on Leigh's role with the USFS; asked if efforts being made for reevaluation of the minimum requirements to fill positions that should require range experience, and do we know that they are currently as they need to be? Member Soares also noted that many sheep graziers still would want to graze on small, foot-access only allotments.

Answer from Leigh: She is the regional range program manager for Region 3, and has worked in the region since 1991. Leigh has been on most of the forests in this region. Her role is to provide information to the public and forest managers regarding forest management. Yes, there has been some reevaluation of minimum requirements, and the USFS is also looking at schools that have or had range programs to see if the education and training provided is adequate to qualify them for USFS range conservationist positions. Animal science and ranch management seem to be lacking in education and training processes in California. This can add two to three years to the process for getting the new hires fully trained for range management positions. Some of the allotments that were closed up in Tahoe were closed due to a lack of economic feasibility for the sheep producers that had been grazing those allotments, and some due to other factors (e.g., no apparent interest). Leigh requested that Member Soares connect her with someone from California Wool Growers to perhaps help with increasing interest in some of those allotments.

Leigh also mentioned the Indefinite Delivery Indefinite Quantity Contracts (IDIQ) for targeted grazing with sheep and cattle for vegetation and weed control over the course of five years. IDIQ covers the whole state, and each forest will pick the pieces of the IDIQ and develops a task order for the kinds of work that needs to be done. This makes contracting simpler, and provides the contractor with some information on the kind of work that is needed and an assurance that payments will be made.

Question from Member Cremers: Leigh mentioned that some positions were still open, and he would like to know what the status is on that.

Answer from Leigh: A lot of forests are down positions and so they are starting to combine duties, but that does not make a lot of sense because a range position is a full-time job on its own. The problem is that the budgets are static, range people are leaving, and in some places, the USFS cannot afford to fill the position because the money doesn't go as far today on the same budget for the past, and not enough people apply and/or are qualified. A position flown as a range conservationist is less likely to have interest and be filled than many other positions (e.g., wildlife biologist).

Question from Member Delbar: Member Delbar is a permittee in the Mendocino National Forest, and she has seen that it is hard to get range managers to stick; does their pay scale level out at a GS-7, and are they leaving for higher paying jobs?

Answer from Leigh: the position in Mendocino is a GS-9, which is not journey level (which is a GS-11), so when they have folks that are at a lower grade but are being asked to do journey level work and are not being paid for it, they tend to leave eventually. But she thinks it is the nature of the job too (in addition to potentially lower pay), as a lot of people are not getting into range.

Member Delbar wanted to put a plug in for range managers having a better understanding of range considerations than do wildlife biologists. Leigh agreed that this is a nation-wide problem: for example, at the last Society for Range Management (SRM) meeting, there were 7–8 positions open, and only 3 applicants. But she also noted that many range professors are also saying they are having a hard time getting folks to even come to class, which could have something to do with covid this year, but perhaps interest in range certifications are also just waning. Leigh believes that when folks are at a GS-11 level, then they are more likely to stay because it is more of a living, sustainable wage.

Chair Horney stated that an academic group with SRM has been trying to find a way to make the job requirements standardized and more clear. Moreover, range conservationists have some of the highest requirements for education and experience. Simultaneously, we are losing faculty and range programs. Leigh agreed this is a problem in a lot of schools.

Chair Horney pointed out that the next agenda item is related, in that the Tahoe National Forest has apparently been having a difficult time filling range conservationist positions.

Dr. Wolf asked about depredation on the US National Forests, and asked how this is managed. Leigh said if there is an issue, the USFS will bring in a trapper, but she has NOT heard about any depredation on the forest, although there have been some on adjacent private land and potentially on BLM.

Member Hagata commented that wolves that were killing cattle in Lassen County in Susanville was on USFS land, and he knows the permittee individually, and it occurred around Antelope Lake.

Member Roney commented that she has experience depredation on private property, and she is surrounded on USFS land, and the private and USFS lands are “almost one and the same” around there. Leigh indicated that she has not been aware of these depredations and that none of them have shown up on the website either. Leigh is more aware about the depredation program in Arizona, but she asked if anyone is paid in California for depredations. Member Roney indicated that the answer was no, and that payments to the operators have not been viewed favorably by some operators because 1) confirmed kills can be hard to prove, and 2) if they start taking money for livestock killed, then it comes across as a tacit agreement of the depredations being ok.

Question from Chair Horney: what happens to allotments that have been vacant for a number of years.

Answer from Leigh: The USFS asks for livestock grazing on allotments every year, and there are really only three non-uses allowed (i.e., personal convenience, resource protection, or research). If the ranch decides to waive the allotment, it works better if they waive it in favor of someone else because then that party gets grant rights; if they

waive it back to the forest the USFS can look at granting it to an adjacent permittee, or putting it out to the people at large, although this really only works well if NEPA has been completed. There is an allotment on Tahoe that is really nice but has been vacant for 20 years, and it doesn't have NEPA on it, so that has been a problem for getting it grazed. The other issue is that the American Resource Recovery Act (ARRA) was a death knell for getting NEPA done on USFS rangelands, because there isn't enough time allocated in the budgets for completing that.

Chair Horney mentioned that a recurrent theme with RMAC is that in the Sierras, a number of allotment holders have been reticent to putting livestock out because of the wolves there; is that leading to fuel accumulations? Leigh indicated that it depends on the allotment, but that is probably a valid concern.

Kristina Wolf will share Leigh's email contact information in an email.

Member Criley indicated that he would be willing to be a go-between between any questions and Leigh, and perhaps he can answer some of the simpler ones and forward the more complex ones to Leigh.

4) Tahoe National Forest replacing Range Managers with Biologists, RMAC position statement review and approval – Chair Marc Horney

Chair Horney shared the draft of the letter produced by himself, in coordination with Dr. Wolf, to be sent to the Tahoe National Forest. Chair Horney asked the committee if RMAC should submit a letter, and if so, what improvements—if any—should be made.

The Chair invited a motion in regards to submitting a letter. Discussion followed:

Member Soares motioned to submit a letter, and Member Riley seconded the motion.

Member Cremers asked if it was a verified fact that “several range management positions on the Tahoe National Forest”. Member Criley indicated that in Leigh's talk, there were 3 positions that were unfilled on the Tahoe National Forest. The sentence was modified to remove the word “several”.

Member Delbar noted that USFS positions are only open for about 7 days, while NRCS has them posted for 4 months, so she feels that the USFS timeframe and a lack of apparent promotion (in relation to NRCS) seem to be inadequate.

Member Criley noted that there is an outreach process, and applicants are supposed to respond and they will get a prompt about when the position is actually open for those 7 days. He feels that the outreach notifications do not seem to make it very far.

Member Delbar indicated that the USFS' GS-7 level is not adequate for attracting folks to fill these positions.

Member Criley also noted that some positions are being filled as term positions, rather than permanent positions, so that makes them a lot less attractive as well, particularly in terms of benefits.

Member Hagata commented that college-age kids are not necessarily aware of these positions, and they are not aware of these career opportunities.

Member Delbar indicated that NRCS hires range specialists as a GS-9 right out of college, and that could perhaps entice more qualified range folks. Perhaps this

example could get USFS to hire at a -9 as well, and keep folks in these positions longer.

Member Soares amended her motion that the letter be approved after being edited as discussed and reviewed for factual information. Member Roney seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote for Approval of Sending the Letter to the Tahoe National Forest:

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| Horney | Aye |
| Hagata | Aye |
| Ross | Aye |
| Cremers | Aye |
| Soares | Aye |
| Van Duyn | Absent |
| Roney | Aye |
| Watson | Aye |
| Landrum | Absent |
| Criley | Aye |
| Murphy | Aye |

The motion carries with 9 ayes and 1 absence. ***The finalized letter will be posted to the RMAC webpage.***

5) CCRC April Webinar Series Recap – Kristina Wolf, RMAC staff

Dr. Wolf gave a summary of the first three parts of the Central Coast Rangeland Coalition (CCRC; <https://ucanr.edu/sites/CCRC/>) webinar series: Cattle Behavior, Grazing Management and Technology 4-part Webinar. A brief summary of the information presented at the first three of these events was provided during the meeting, and additional web resources and contact information for some of the speakers was also provided in the chat, and is also given here:

- 4/8 Planned Grazing Using Mobile App Technology on the Central Coast – Aaron Lazanof at alazanof@calpoly.edu or Zach McFarlane at zmcfarla@calpoly.edu
- 4/15 Cattle grazing behavior and monitoring techniques and the impact on rangeland resources and conservation – Megan Banwarth
- 4/22 Burn Boss: Using Cattle Grazing and Prescribed Burns for Vegetation Management - Anthony Stornetta at astornetts@gmail.com or Zach McFarlane zmcfarla@calpoly.edu
 - <https://www.sare.org/publications/rangeland-management-strategies/multi-species-grazing/>
 - <https://grazer.ca.uky.edu/content/multi-species-grazing>

Web recordings of these presentations are generally posted on the CCRC website, although this may take some time to occur. ***Dr. Wolf will inform RMAC about when this occurs.***

Member Criley stated that some graziers want to put in fancy grazing systems on annual grasslands, and he feels that the utility of some of these systems can be very low and not offset the cost of implementing them; Chair Horney concurred with this

concern, and indicated that there are some perennial grasses on Escuela Ranch, on which this particular topic was discussed in the first webinar of the series on 4/8/2021.

6) UCCE and Placer RCD Webinar Series on Prescribed Fire – Member Richard Ross

This item was skipped and will be pushed to the next RMAC meeting in April, as Member Ross was out of town and unable to present during this meeting.

7) Planning Update on RMAC Webinar Summer Series– Kristina Wolf, RMAC staff & Chair Marc Horney

Chair Horney indicated that he reviewed the previous meeting minutes, and put together a list of topics from the previous meeting is too long to cover for the webinar series, and asked for members to state their high priority issues. Number of “votes” tallied by RMAC members who contributed to the discussion were as follows:

1. highlight case studies or model programs where people are incorporating livestock grazing into fuels management, audience focus is everyone (land planners, land managers, Fire Safe Councils FSCs, etc) – 1
2. regrowth and post-fire (grazing) management – 2
3. using grazing services for managing fuels – 1
4. hurdles to becoming a prescribed grazer – 0
5. differences in managing cattle vs. goats or sheep – 0
6. ecological impacts of fuels treatments – 0
7. type conversion, interactions with climate change, and livestock management and evacuations during a fire (e.g., Ag Pass) – 0

Chair Horney indicated that topics 1, 2, and 3 could likely be easily folded together into a series. Member Cremers indicated that fuels management in riparian areas could be an important topic as well. Dr. Wolf indicated that topic 4 could align with topics 1–3 as well, particularly in terms of grazing to manage fuels.

In regards to the length and structure of the webinar last year, Chair Marc stated that we are likely committed to a virtual meeting this year, because although covid conditions are improving, if we plan to go live, things may not go as hoped by the time of the July webinar series. Ms. Hannigan indicated that an event like this is unlikely to be approved by the state by July, as most recent guidance for the state is that such kinds of events are possible but things like proof of vaccination or recent covid tests would likely be provided, and that is not likely to be easily managed.

Chair Horney asked that members provide the RMAC with examples of case studies, graziers managing fuel loads by targeted grazing, and other related projects that they are aware of that might fit topics 1–3, above, and ***email them to Dr. Wolf by close of business Wednesday May 5th.***

In regards to the dates of the webinar, we were thinking that the event occur in July, with a possibility of moving into August if needed; however, the dates have not yet

been set. By the time of the next meeting, we should have this largely planned out, and we will inform the committee as decisions are made.

8) Updates from Partner Organizations & Public Forum

Member Cremers asked if anyone has heard from Member John Van Duyn, and he is wondering if he still wants to be on the committee. ***Ms. Hannigan indicated she will get in touch with him to see what is going on.*** Member Roney announced that the last time she heard from John he was dealing with fire in Lassen County on properties he manages, and he may be completely inundated at this time.

California Wool Growers Association (CWGA) – Member Soares provided an update on the shepherd wage issue: there is a proposed administrative solution which includes the governor directing the labor agency to adopt the definition of the federal work week, which was set in 2015 under Obama at 48 hours. This was upheld by then judge Merrick Garland. CWGA is hopeful that this proposed solution will be accepted; currently the labor agency is using 160 hours in their equations, and that is what the agency says they are doing, which ranchers could not afford, of course. This will go into effect in January if the proposed solution is not accepted. Another effort is getting support letters from County Board(s) of Supervisors about the above-described solution of adopting the federal definition of a work week of 48 hours.

California Resource Conservation District (RCD) – Member Murphy indicated that the RCDs are reviving the rancher-to-rancher peer-to-peer learning community. Last January, they planned 30 field events across California, all of which were canceled of course due to covid, but they are working on getting this reinstated. If anyone is interested, contact Member Murphy, who can connect you with Peter Donovan (Soil Carbon Coalition), Richard King (retired NRCS soil conservationist), and Kent Reeves, among others. They are applying for some more funding to support these efforts. Now they are planning on doing 30 over 5 years, instead of 1, but are hoping to support building ranching communities.

Next meeting: June 17th 12:30 PM

Meeting Adjourned at 2:10 PM.