

Special Meeting

August 5, 2013

The Board of Supervisors of the County of Inyo, State of California, met in special session at the hour of 6:00 p.m., on Monday, August 5, at the Big Pine Town Hall at 183 Dewey Street, Bishop, with the following Supervisors present: Chairperson Linda Arcularius presiding, Jeff Griffiths, Rick Pucci, Mark Tillemans and Matt Kingsley. Supervisor Tillemans led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public comment The Chairperson announced the public comment period and there was no one from the public wishing to address the Board.

County Dept. Reports The Chairperson announced the County Department Report period. The County Administrator took the opportunity to introduce the new Public Works Director, Mr. Clint Quilter to the audience.

Planning/Forest Management Plan Topic Papers Input Mr. Josh Hart, Planning Director, provided an overview presentation on the Inyo National Forest Management Plan and the Topic Papers the Board is asking for input on. He provided some background information, explaining that the Forest Service is required to coordinate with local jurisdictions, and that we are in Phase I of a three phase process, which is the Assessment Phase, with the final document being proposed to be released in 2016. He said that the Topic Papers that are currently out for comment address a wide array of background information about the forest, i.e., socio-economics, biological resources, special uses, issues and trends. He said that the County identified priorities in 2012 that focuses on three main topic areas which are (a) access, (b) vibrant economy, and (c) local culture. Mr. Hart highlighted areas under each of those topics, i.e., protecting roads and trails, identifying roadless areas for removal, planning for conflicts between biological resources and access, supporting consumptive and sustainable uses of the forest that contribute to the County's economy and culture, considering a mitigation bank to provide for mitigation of off forest impacts, protecting local culture, addressing public safety and providing access in the forest for gathering, sightseeing, exploration, camping, etc. Mr. Hart introduced Ms. Deb Schweitzer and Ms. Susan Joyce of the Inyo National Forest, who reviewed the plan and provided more detail on the Topic Papers, including talking about the goals and objections of the Plan, how the Plan will frame future Forest management, and how the Forest Service must work within existing legal constraints.

The Board heard from the following people:

Mr. Duane Rossi, Big Pine Resident, talked about his concerns with the elimination of trout for the protection of the frogs and the toads. He questioned the motives behind the people who had developed the scientific data that had resulted in the species being listed as endangered and/or threatened, and critical habitat needing to be designated. Mr. Rossi went on to talk about impacts these designations have on grazing, questioning decisions made regarding suspending grazing activities in the Kern Plateau Grazing allotments and the impact that decision had on the land.

Supervisor Arcularius explained that the Kern Plateau grazing was a separate project, but explained how Mr. Rossi's concerns with grazing could be incorporated. She said that by generalizing the comments, i.e., what are the pros and cons of suspending grazing activities in the forest and what are the goals of the Forest Service when they

take those kinds of actions. Mr. Rossi went on to express his thoughts concerning the eradication of fish in the backcountry lakes in favor of frog habitat, questioning why certain lakes were selected instead of other lakes. He suggested that the frogs be raised in hatcheries like the fish and expressed concern of what kind of impact the fish kill will have on the local tourist economy. Supervisor Arcularius articulated that from Mr. Rossi's comments the County could ask the following questions: What is the role of the Forest Service in critical habitat designation? How does the Forest Service Plan relate to that and what is the relationship between the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife actions on Forest Service lands.

Mr. Steve McLaughlin, Fourth District Resident and a Friends of the Inyo Board Member, said that he felt that the Assessment was well done and captured the best science on fire regime, on stressors, on climate change, on invasive species, on disease, on insects, etc. He noted that in many places the Plan addresses the role and need for volunteers which he felt was important. Mr. McLaughlin went on to address his major concern is the reoccurring theme throughout the document of capacity, i.e., what is the Forest Service going to be able to do given the constraints of funding and personnel. He talked at length about how the lack of capacity will impact Plan implementation. He provided specific instances where the document addresses capacity issues, noting that in Chapter 1 on terrestrial, aquatic, and riparian ecosystems, the sentence that caused him great concern was "Current resources are wholly inadequate to stop the oncoming tide of non-native species on the forest."

Mr. Howard Walker said that he has a Masters Degree in Biology, and while he hasn't had a chance to read the document, he has concern that decisions regarding what is best for the Forest are not being made locally by the people who know what's going on, but are being made by the people in Sacramento and Washington. He provided instances in his history where the local level decisions were usurped by the higher ups with disastrous results. He said that there is a worldwide decline in amphibian populations, with the experts saying that it is a fungal disease that is causing the demise of the populations. He implored the County to get more local control by local biologists who know what is going on and not have the policy set in Washington D.C.

Supervisor Kingsley agreed with the remarks concerning capacity that were made earlier by Mr. McLaughlin. He said that he felt the chances of the Forest Service getting sufficient money to treat fuel was slim, but that it was the County's responsibility to let the Forest Service know that we want the fuel reduced around our communities, as well as identifying other areas of local concern and importance. He explained that he felt this is where the County was providing input on the Assessment, letting the Forest Service know what it is that the County would like to see addressed in the Plan.

Mr. Greg Weirick addressed his concern with the sudden need for a dramatic change on the forest since things have been working well for a long time. He talked about his concern that this Plan is the second salvo to closing more roads in the forest. He said that he did not believe that it was man that was causing the problems. He noted that the frogs are being impact by a fungus, the desert tortoises are being impacted by the crows, and the excess fire fuels are being impacted by lack of funds and resources. He said that he felt the science behind much of the Assessment was flawed. He said that he did not believe the Assessment sufficiently identified economic drivers and said that the economic analysis should be redone. Mr. Weirick noted activities that he thought should be addressed including expanding the comment on motorized recreation, and identifying hunting, rock-hounding, hiking, and prospecting as local economic drivers.

Mr. Mike Johnson, President of the Eastern Sierra Four Wheel Drive Club and a member of the Friends of the Inyo addressed the Board. He said he had been attempting to access the documents on line and it was extremely confusing. Mr. Johnson and Ms. Joyce discussed how to access documents on the web page. Mr. Johnson questioned the amount of paper work that is being released concerning this plan, saying he believes the public is being buried in paperwork. Mr. Johnson went on to talk about making sure that public access and motorized recreation are protected. He also asked for an explanation concerning the "mitigation bank." Mr. Hart explained that the mitigation bank concept is important to Inyo County because it will allow entities to provide work on existing forest lands instead of trading local private lands on a weighted ratio basis. Supervisor Arcularius explained that the County would like to use mitigation on forest service lands in place of taking private lands for mitigation.

Mr. Josh Nichols, Big Pine Resident, expressed his concern that a balance be reached. He said he recognized the need for regulations, but they should not be excessive. Mr. Nichols expressed his concern with the people tasked with enforcing what is identified in the more than 1,000 pages, saying he did not believe that they would have the ability to read, comprehend and implement something of this magnitude. He also questioned the one size fits all mentality that often times permeates these types of studies, saying that things that work in larger metropolitan areas are not applicable in small rural locations like Inyo County.

Mr. Mike Johnson addressed the Board to add his thoughts that there is a need for more local control. Ms. Sidney Quinn of Big Pine, addressed her concern with a lack of back country rangers, saying that hiking is an important part of the County's economy and the importance of these rangers needs to be recognized.

The Board Members made concluding remarks, thanking the members of the audience for their interest in this subject and for taking the time to share their thoughts with the Board.

Adjournment

The Chairperson adjourned the special meeting at 7:45 p.m.

Chairperson, Inyo County Board of Supervisor

*Attest: KEVIN D. CARUNCHIO
Clerk of the Board*

by: _____
Patricia Gunsolley, Assistant