

PUBLIC LANDS ROUNDTABLE MINUTES

Meeting Location: BLM Ridgecrest Office

Minutes of: January 23, 2025

Called to order at: 6:00pm by Chairman George Croll

Pledge of allegiance was led by George Croll.

George introduced himself as the new chair, and that is purpose is to facilitate the meeting. He also explained his experience with working as a government civil servant.

Katie Meyer from the BLM announced that she is the grant writer for California OHV grants from the State. Her meeting will be on February 18th as an Open House. The first meeting that day is a Stakeholder meeting at 4:30pm and public is 5:15pm to review grants applications. Stakeholders are considered to be land owners, groups like the Gear Grinders, etc.

A MOTION was made by Libby Vincent, 2nd by Charlie Hattendorf, to approve the December 5, 2024 minutes. The MOTION was left on table and not yet approved.

Instead ... George asked that each of us introduce ourselves and give a brief statement of give a brief view of what you think this group should be about. Of what we do and how we do it.

PLRT MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Arzell Hale: Represents **large mines**. He is amazed at the amount of knowledge sitting around this table on public lands. As a group, he thinks we should get together and decide what we need to pursue and how we need pursue it, and what is most important to all of our organizations. SVM owns about 1/3 of the land that they mine and they lease the other 2/3 from the BLM.

John Auburn: Represents the group **Breakfast Burritos** who is the voice for the Burros and equestrian users. He is also President of the Over the Hill Track Club. He deals with the BLM a lot for permitting events. He thinks this is a good place to share information and it represents a lot of different opinions, which is information that we can take back to our own organizations. It's a good idea to see what else we can do as a group; we've had a few trash clean-ups, and would like to see us get more of the local community involved.

Dana Houston, works for the BLM: BLM gets to work with all of the groups. There are many layers to work through to get things done and getting an outside perspective is always good. This group is very unique to the Ridgecrest Field Office. No other field office has a group like this, throughout all of the districts of the BLM. They are also interested in having more groups like this in other field offices. Arzell said that he has known Joe Stout, the new BLM California State Office Director, for many years, and he is planning on visiting the R/C field office in January. Dana said he would be here sometime in early February. Mary said that also unique to the Ridgecrest office is the Adopt-a-cabin program and that there is no other office that wants to deal with it. Mary also said that Gary Luckeroth, who replaced Bill Maddux, has put this meeting on his calendar to be at the next meeting to represent the Adopt-a-cabin program.

Mary Grimsley: Represents the **Gear Grinders 4WD Club**. It's been interesting to watch this group evolve. When it first started, we use to sit down and it was the off-roaders and the environmentalists ... it was one against the other. What's come around is that we have a lot more in common than we have differences, and that's why we're all here. Of course, our main focus is keeping trails open. One of the things that we, and George has been involved with the last couple of months, is vehicle removal. People who steal a vehicle or just drive a vehicle out to the DTNRA ... and we like to do what we can to remove these derelict vehicles, some are burned out. Over the years we have done trash removal; one was an apartment that was emptied out over in Red Mountain or Joburg, and dumped out at the railroad tracks on the Trona/Red Mountain Road. We've helped with an Eagle Scout project, so we're willing to help. We are a stickler to staying on approved trails, not going cross country where it's not allowed. There are those who do, and that makes us angry because we lose land because of it. This group was started probably in the late 1980's, as I am one of the founding members.

Charlie Hattendorf: Represents **IW Gem & Mineral Society**, and have interest in historic mining and also Bickell Camp to be specific. I started recreational gold mining, which I'm still interested in. I went into the El Paso's where I found Walt Bickell being evicted by the BLM. Charlie went on to explain that the BLM had zero tolerance at the time for anyone living out on the public land and that they only wanted large mining companies mining. The Regional Manager of the BLM went out to see Walt Bickell (70+ years old) and basically evict him. There was a large number of people plus a Bakersfield reporter there, which brought negative attention to the BLM, especially when a week later Walt Bickell had a stroke. Mary also mentioned

Walt Baakonen at Steam Wells was another caught in the BLM no tolerance web. At that time, the removal of cabins was the BLM's main objective. It was during this time that I came to these BLM Steering Committee meetings and there was a lot of animosity; it was the start of the Desert Protection Act, S.21; Alan Cranston was Senator of California, and Diane Feinstein followed Cranston to be the State Senator. They used the number of vehicles going to Vegas as the amount of people who were visiting the desert and to show that it needed to be protected. These people were never getting out of their car, as their objective was Vegas. So where are we as far as policy? I don't see us changing policy ... but as understanding what policy is. Policy always come down to interpretation, and from what I've seen, regional managers take the letter of the law and interpret it as best they can. So if we can just focus on those things that really matter to us as individuals & groups, and apply those mandates in a more humane way and if we can temper that edict that says nobody can do anything. I do the website and if anyone wants to help, that would be great. We need to get the information out to the public. We could use someone to represent grazing.

Mary Grimsley brought up that this group started up as the BLM Steering Committee and about 15 years down the line, when the BLM decided we could not have that name, so that is when we changed the name to the Public Lands Roundtable. The former name implied that we had some influence on the BLM, which was not the case. We think it may have been when Hector Villalobos was the Manager, but not sure.

Kayla Browne: Represents **Friends of the Inyo**. The one thing I really appreciate about this group is all the information that is shared, the historic knowledge, and hearing everyone's different perspectives and also just learning about more of the field office areas other than my little piece up north in Inyo County. I see it as giving the BLM different perspectives and inputs on the things that are happening and finding out what people really care about.

Libby Vincent: Represents Maturango Museum. I've lived in Ridgecrest for 10 years and have sat on the board of the museum for 7, going on 8 years. She enjoys exploring the desert and really appreciates what the BLM does with very limited resources to maintain, control, and develop such a huge area of land. Coming to these meetings gives me an idea from the stake-holders their interests; I know I'm listening and I think the BLM is listening too, and then make some use of that input and information. When we are all out in the desert, we see trash, and who else are we going to call to come clean up? BLM always goes out and cleans it up. Up in the Radmacher's hiking, we ran across a big exercise bike and a king or queen sized mattress. Who are you going to call if the BLM is not here? Nobody! So from the level of very functional concerns to the high levels of guidance and policy concerns, this is a chance to give BLM input on the issues we are facing and how to decide to proceed managing, so for me it has been a hugely valuable experience. I see the museum as a kind of central community activity in town, and so we can make information available to the people and public visiting this town. I see as being a very important part of life in this community where the BLM manages everything all around town for miles & miles and it is important to have good relations between BLM and members of the community, and I think we do.

Will Liebscher: Represents the **Public**. We are the stakeholders of many of the groups whose advocacy and interests is in the desert. This is a tool for the BLM to find partners to do things in the desert and vice/versa. I've wanted to attract as many representatives, the interested groups who are interested in the desert. This is just a small group compared to when we doing WEMO or the DRCEP, so we need to attract as many of those people as possible, so this is where Charlie comes in with the website. We need to tell the public that we are separate from the BLM, that we are a public group. We exchange information from the BLM to the public and the public to the BLM as a networking group. It's kind of similar to what's happening at the Federal level with the BLM, which is the Desert Advisory Council (DAC) except this is a local organization, although we are not limited to local boundaries like city & county. This is unique to the Desert District Office for networking. Apparently they like it and would like to see more of it. We come here to exchange information, sometimes take tours, and give BLM feedback on the spot. It's more about exchanging information and less about going out & cleaning up trash and doing events with this group. It's more about observation of what goes on here in the desert. What I've noticed is the large fluctuation in BLM politics and especially the administration, like about the cabins ... you know, a complete 180 degrees. It's a sensitive topic. We get informed him of the projects, litigation, events, & activities, and those are usually public events, but sometimes we get to do some things that are restricted, like ride with these guys; we learn the ropes on how the BLM works. They have the hardest job out here, which is pleasing everybody who wants a piece of this desert, and of course you can't do that. We give our personal feedback on policies, not that it really matters, but sometimes it does. I think we should have a list of all the organizations that have ever been a part of this for whatever reason because a lot of people have dropped out after the DRECP & WEMO, and we had standing room only and heated discussions. So I think we should make a list of all the different interests that we would like to attract. I have down grazing, rock & mineral, off road of all types, radio & ham, horses, and on and on. A lot of the people that come to this organization are the lead people in their own organization and that is who we need to attract, and they can take this information back. This is a forum for direct involvement with the BLM

Arzell Hale added that he has been working with Searles Valley Minerals for 47 years, but before that I spent 10 years in Arizona working for Phelps/Dodge Copper Corp., big copper mining and I was very familiar with about 5 copper companies. Back there BLM and copper companies hated each other; I mean they were at loggerheads all the time. Unbelievable! Now you know, out here it's just amazing. I think that we, Searles Valley Minerals, we have an absolutely excellent relationship with this BLM office. There's no head knocking, but respect that goes both ways. When Carl Symons was here, when there was a problem, he would come to us or we would come over here ... we did that all the time.

Guests: Susan Croll

George then suggested, after listening around the table, that one of things he thinks we should start out doing is putting together a list of all the things that affect the BLM, the desert, & our lands. We'll do a survey, rank what is important to you, like clean up trash in the desert, and I'd like to publish the PLRT's 10 top things that we need to do in the desert. So first we need to gather together all of the topics that we need people to vote on. Send George anything that you think is worth putting on the list, then I'll compile it, then we'll put a survey out to everyone on the PLRT, then we'll rank them all, put an article in the paper and put it on Face Book that these are most important things we think we should work with the BLM on. Some of things could be, the BLM needs better funding, BLM needs better pay, BLM needs more people, or better equipment. Dream big and if we don't get anywhere, at least we tried.

Charlie Hattendorf then opens up with "I have a big one" that they (BLM) would never ever look at. Safety in the desert and adopt-a-cabin. At that time they brought in OSHA, and they heard about these cabins, the way it was portrayed at the time. People back east in the government heard about these cabins being available on public lands that did not have handicap access, didn't fit safety concerns, and didn't meet building codes. But this is ridiculous ... these are old cabins out in the middle of nowhere and historic. But the one thing that no one can really disagree with is, we have an extreme environment ... we have wind, rain, heat ... so just having cabin that you can go to can save your life. When I would bring that kind of thing up mumbled.

Back to George: so we're going to spend a couple of months coming up with the top 10 things that are important, then I'll ask someone to write an article for the newspaper, and every week there is another article ... overheard ... "that is if this newspaper will print it" and Mary "The News Review would have." George feels that we might be able to buy some space. We can put out there on social media. Maybe have a Face Book page with a moderator to keep the junk and the trolls out.

There was a long discussion about how to deal with the government, being private citizens and a private group going to our representatives asking for funding that is needed to complete a project.

Libby interjected "We have a voice."

Will summed up with "We may be the vehicle for communication between the BLM, the government, and the public."

A group email needs to go out to our members requesting ideas for this list.

BLM UPDATES: by Dana Houston, Ridgecrest BLM

Katie Meyer came in and talked about the Grant applications earlier.

Our last cycle of grants were not all approved; we did not get our Ground Op grant because of the WEMO litigation. ... it was taken away. We were awarded a Restoration grant, a Law Enforcement grant, and a Safety & Education grant. That was a big hit for us, as it affected staffing. They also cut the same grant from the Friends of Jawbone because of WEMO.

WEMO: Craig Beck would be the one to have come give us an update and explain what is going on with the litigation on WEMO.

BURROS IN TRONA: If we could get a letter, as we are having a lot of issues, burros getting hit by cars and they're encroaching on people's private property. We're working on that, putting in a request for an emergency gather to the district office, but we need letters from the public. John Auburn approached Walmart and received a \$1,000 grant to put up signs that discouraged people from feeding them. George asked if the horses & burros can be fed up at the corral facilities, and yes they can be fed carrots. There will be a large Open House event at the horse/burro facility on April 12. We are hoping for a large adoption of animals.

STAFFING: The BLM has hired a person for the Wild Horse & Burro Corrals, so that will be open on a more regular basis. We have also hired 2 new people; a Petroleum Engineer technician and a new NEPA Coordinator. With the new administration, there is a hiring freeze via Executive Order, but before that went into effect, we managed to get 3 new people in the door. We're still short a geologist, a biologist some of our key staff. We have been borrowing an archeologist from Barstow, which has been a huge help to us. We do have a Range person that fills in for biologist, she wears two hats.

One other thing that came with that Executive Order: A temporary suspension of delegation, so Phil is not able to sign any _____, NEPA's, Notices to Proceed, or Right of Ways, or any of that. So any decisions that need to go out will not go out. We will continue to work on all of these and stack them up, until the EO is lifted, so that when it is, Phil will be able to sign away.

LAW ENFORCEMENT: There were no issues during MLK weekend for Law Enforcement. Tom is out on the Santa Clarita fire right now.

You can go to eplanning.gov to look up what events are coming up.

Mojave Pistachio's was given 4 years of water. They lost their lawsuit with the Ground Water Authority.

NEW BUSINESS:

DVNP illegal driving on the Eureka Dunes: Not a whole lot known, other than they drove over an endangered plant and close to 3 others. They are looking for any information on who did it.

FIELD TRIP: Went to Conglomerate Mesa had approximately 20 people, including the mining company K2 Gold personnel. Libby said it was an excellent tour. Libby, Will, Hector, Kayla, and _____ from the PLRT went on the trip. They went in on the south end, then had a 3 to 4 mile walk to the first drill site, and walked & talked as they went. It was nice to be able to ask question while on site.

We discussed the possibility of commenting as a group on the K2 Gold EIS, but we would all have to agree on the content, and if 1 person does not agree, then we would all go back to our groups and write our own letters of support or opposition.

TRONA PINNACLES: Possibility of getting it nominated as protected, so we'll put it on our list.

TRAINING AREA AT JAWBONE: The State is going to come in and start requiring 1 day of training & education before they can take their motorcycles, side-by-sides, etc. out into the desert. Encourage you to go to a Friends of Jawbone meeting, where you can learn from others like Randy, 3rd Wednesday of the month at Jawbone Station at 9:00am. Talk to Randy Banis ... he is the President of Friends of Jawbone, is on the Desert Advisory Council. The DAC is the federal level of what we do here. The Secretary of the Interior appoints 15 people and they meet 4 times year for 2 days; one day for a tour and one day for the meeting, rotating between the 5 districts. Then there a one day tour and a one day meeting with the State Parks OHV Division that meets four times a year, which deals with recreation, where you can see the top levels of vehicular recreationists. What is important is what goes on during breaks in the meetings and out on the tours, where you can network and gather information individually from the different participants.

OLD BUSINESS:

Trail Connections: Will thinks that we need to develop/designate a trail that connects Ridgecrest to Red Mtn and Joburg. There is the City, County, & State that would have to work together to designate a trail. George said he has talked to a Ridgecrest Cop, and as long as you are not acting stupid, they will not bother you, but if you have a designated trail, then you end up with problems and people complaining.

Field Trip to the Trona Pinnacle: Mark volunteered to take us to see the Trona Pinnacle, which is behind Trona. We'll table until Mark is at a meeting.

Speaker: Arzell Hale reminded us that Dennis Cruz, President of Searles Valley Minerals would be willing to fly out from Kansas to make a presentation about SVM at next month's meeting. We would all like to have a tour of the plant sometime, also.

Adjourned at: 7:50pm

NEXT PLR MEMBERSHIP MEETING will be 2/27/25.

Respectfully submitted, Mary Grimsley

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE: