

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning Inventory Data Examples from BLM Plans

PRESENTER: Good morning.

CLASS PARTICIPANT: Aloha!

PRESENTER: I don't want to steal Stuart's thunder. What I'm going to do is get back into planning step 3 and talk about some actual experiences with RMP's in terms of data collection, and I'm going back to -- at least for the Dillon -- both the primary and secondary data that we used.

When I started working on the Dillon, I had done most of my work in eastern Montana, which is very different than western Montana. So I was faced with an area that I really didn't know very much about when I walked into that area. But it turned out that we had lots and lots and lots of information on that area. John Russell, whom Stuart had referred to earlier, was working for the Forest Service, and he was working on a social assessment for the area that we were also looking at and produced this 400-page volume based on interviews that he had done in eight counties in that area, and they covered socioeconomics, community structure, just all kinds of information. So that was something that was very helpful to me when I worked on this project.

One thing I wanted to mention, a social assessment is different from a social impact assessment. You'll see both of those terms and sometimes they're kind of used interchangeably. The social assessment is kind of like EPS and it's like a

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bunch of data describing an area but it's not going to be impact assessment for the area, but at least in Montana the Forest Service has done social assessments that have almost covered the whole state. So there's a lot of information that may be available in your state as well from social assessments that the Forest Service has conducted.

One of the first things I do when I start working on an RMP is kind of do a data dump with the brains of the team members and just sit down with them at the very first I.D. team meeting and talk with them and find out what they know about the area. One of the things I learned in Dillon is the two counties I was working with, Beaverhead and Madison, were very different because Madison had the influence of Bozeman in a corner of the county and Beaverhead was -- still perceived itself as a lot more rural. So there's things that you can learn from the people in the planning area that are not social scientists but they know from living in that area and interacting with the people in the area. So that's a great way to gather information.

And I guess one of the things that I really think is important here is if you're contracting out your social assessment, you need to have somebody that's going to be in the area enough that they're talking with the I.D. team members and learning what they know about the area as well as what they know about the resources in the area. It's just really important to have somebody on site for at least a period of time.

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Another thing I'm going to get into in more detail, hopefully not excruciating detail, is the interviews I did with the local and the regional residents.

Another thing that was really helpful for this project, although it was not as helpful as some other ones, was the scoping information. A lot of times you'll get not very much scoping information and you'll get all kinds of information when people respond to the draft. So you'll have a lot of stuff you didn't have initially but it's kind of too late unless you're going to do extensive reworks from the draft to the final. So, anyway, I think Stuart mentioned this to use, we use the scoping information for this purpose. You're going to take that information and analyze it in a different way than it was analyzed for scoping purpose, and you're maybe looking at a lot of the anecdotal information that people gave you about their experience with the area, their tie to the area, and lot of times you'll have letterheads that tell you that this person is representing an environmental agency and so that's kind of the line that they're taking. This person's been a rancher in the area for a hundred years. So you can really kind of divide the scoping information up by the background or the affiliation of the person that sent that in and you can get some pretty good feeling for what people are thinking in the area, but again, you don't know how representative that information is. But still, it's pretty good anecdotal information.

Visiting with the town people I think is really important, basically visiting with anybody in the area, but talking to the person whose registering you at the hotel, when you go out to eat, talking to those people. When I was in Dillon I had my

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daughter in day-care there, so that's another contact that you have with the area. Just kind of talking to regular people I think is really important.

Visiting the field area, the Field Office in a physical sense is really important. When I first went to Dillon there's seven or eight smaller mountain regions in the area but people tie their experiences with BLM to those mountain regions, and you really have to figure out what's important to people, where things are located, if you're going to be credible in terms of talking to them. Especially in a state like Montana. If you don't know the area you're going to have a problem getting people to open up with you and they'll feel like they can't tell you what's going on if you don't know where certain things are. So I think just going out with the team members and exploring the area and just seeing what you're talking about.

And in the Dillon resource area it was kind of subdivided into little regions, like there's the Centennial Range here, there's another range here, smaller ranchers in one part, larger ranchers in another part. Even though it's a relatively small two-county area, there were lots of areas where people kind of would consider themselves neighbors here and not neighbors someplace else. So you need to get a feeling for the kind of the different groupings going on in the area, and this is something that I think the social scientist is not going to be able to do unless they spend some time in the area.

Information from cooperators can be really helpful, especially not so much in this plan but in subsequent plans. We've had cooperators that attended every

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meeting and really interacted as a part of the planning team. That can be really helpful.

So this is the body of information that we had to work with for the Dillon RMP, and like I said, it was more information than I could use, and John Russell, who did the data collection for the Forest Service, and I interacted quite a bit about it, and he's a great resource to have. He does great work and is actually doing a lot of the BLM work for California, as I understand it.

Okay. I'm going to go into what we did for the Dillon RMP. Basically we had several goals for the interviews that we did. Wanted to know what was important to the populations and tie that to quality of life, because I knew we weren't going to be making major changes in what we did. The changes we made would be fairly subtle and probably be more related to quality of life than anything like population changes or affects to services and things like that. They were going to be pretty subtle changes.

Wanted to find out from people how they were connected to the BLM lands in the region, how did they use them, how did they value them. Attitudes towards the issues that we had, and the issues were the pretty standard issues that a lot of you are working with. We did not have oil and gas. So there was not any kind of overarching issue. It was transportation planning, recreation, Wild and Scenic Rivers, ACEC's, that type of stuff. How they felt the resolution of the issues -- possible resolution of the issues would affect them. What, for instance -- and this

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was probably one of the things that was actually too complicated to ask, as we were moving toward proper functioning conditioning of riparian areas did they want to move quickly, did they want to move slowly? Things like that. Although, like I said, when I get into the critique I'm not sure how well that worked.

Collected the information by potentially affected group and we identified six or seven groups and tried talk to five people representative of each group. We didn't really have the option do having a survey because of OMB, but I really felt the interviews were more appropriate than a survey would have been, because we wanted to get in-depth information with lots of follow-up to the questions that we had. So we didn't really consider doing something like a survey.

Going through the interview methods really quickly, we had two interviewers. We did about 45 face-to-face interviews that took anywhere from one to probably -- there were some that were three hours in length. Met in the field. I remember meeting over a lake in Madison County with somebody on a traffic pullout. So whatever was convenient for us was where we met. Tried to get five interviews per affected group, and if I knew the group was really diverse, like recreationists, then we would talk to more people.

The county representative who was a little bit nervous about this whole thing attended some of the interviews and did that to help kind of smooth things away with the county cooperators. As I said before, we did not get OMB clearance. We did not ask the same questions of 10 or more people. Using an interview

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guide like Stuart was talking about rather than a series of questions. The cost was between four and \$5,000, and it took about a month to do the interviews.

CLASS PARTICIPANT: [inaudible]

PRESENTER: No, I think I stayed at someplace else. There was only one person that didn't want to be interviewed. People brought in their whole family when they came to the office. I mean, there's the husband, there's the wife, there's the kids. So even people that were -- had reservations about BLM were very willing to talk. That part of it was really fun.

We talked to all the county commissioners, all the RAC members, and those are set up so they represent different groups. Ranchers by place simply because there was large ranchers in parts of one county, small ranchers in another, so we wanted to try to get more than one type of rancher. Different communities in the area. People in Twin Bridges. People in Dillon. Even so we didn't do analysis by each community, we were trying to kind of cover the whole waterfront.

Recreationists. Big very diverse group. So we tried to talk to motorized and nonmotorized recreationists. And then hunters, outfitters. Resource use advocates and resource protection advocates is kind of how I'm describing environmental groups and the people associated with them and then if we're going to do that, we had to have groups on the other side, and one of the things that I make it very clear in the analysis is there's lots of overlap between these groups. It's not like we're talking about a pure group of people whose attitudes

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are all the same. It's just kind of an artifact, a way to try to look at the impacts by group, but recognizing that there are people that fit in many groups, there are people that fit in no groups. You know, it's merely an artifact for analysis. And I say appear couple different places to make sure people see that.

We don't need to spend a lot of time on this. We had the information typed into a database and did a lot of cutting and pasting, kind of like content analysis in terms of pulling information out. We really didn't try to count numbers on anything. We were trying to get why people thought the way they did, what people thought would be the effects, and then the secondary and tertiary effects that we talked about yesterday when we were doing the cause and effect web. That was really the goal of this survey, not trying to count numbers of people doing different things, or trying to decide how many people fit into one group and how many fit into another group. We weren't doing that type of analysis.

In terms of what the interviews told us, I think that the main thing we got out of it, and we pretty much already knew it, is how important recreation quality was for people's quality of life. In that area, that's extremely important for people.

Another thing that there seemed to be universal agreement on was their support for road closures for wildlife habitat, even among the OHV proponents. This third one, preference for active wildlife management, seems pretty obvious now, but at that time there was just a lot of wildfire activity and so attitudes were influx, and I think this is probably supported by other data that's been collected on wildfires, but people -- in terms of burning to prevent things, people really want everything

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fought.

There was a problem with Big Creek Backcountry Byway in that people were getting lost out there, people were getting stuck in the mud. So we talked to the people out there and tried to get some ideas on how we could resolve that problem, and one of the issues actually was should we decommission the Backcountry Byway and make it not a backcountry byway because of the trouble people were having that tried to go on the byway.

Mostly what we got was how people felt about activities -- or how people felt about the area as opposed to what the effects would be of BLM actions or the BLM alternatives.

There were some things of the survey that I felt were really positive. I thought we got some pretty thoughtful suggestions on some things, particularly with our travel management plan where people maybe hadn't known the area as well as some of the people that were interviewing, and we had maps of the area, and so people could show us some roads and loop trails they thought would be really helpful -- or useful for people that wanted that type of activity.

As I said before, we only had one refusal. People were very interested in being interviewed and a lot of people brought in other family members so we could talk to more than one person at a time.

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I think we talked to a good cross section of people. I was fairly comfortable with that, that we could talk about a group being affected in a certain way, not putting numbers to it or anything like that, very qualitative, but I was comfortable with what we were able to say. Again, clarifying quality of life issues for the different groups, I think we were successful at that. And also using the information to verify information that we had gotten from other sources in terms of recreation, verifying information we got from the recreation planner, verifying information that we got from recreation use groups had that certain goals. So it's another way to get information, and I think it verified -- when you're using qualitative information, it's really important to verify the information that you have from different sources.

There were a lot of things that didn't work with this survey, as I've said before.

We ended more with attitudes than how people would be affected by the alternatives. On some issues, people tend to do respond on party line, so I don't think we really got what they felt about things if you said to somebody with a high interest in environmental issues, you know: How fast should you move toward proper functioning condition? Of course they're going to say faster rather than slower. So those types of things, I don't think, worked very well. I think our interview guide was way too long. You know, we should have stuck to maybe three or four -- if you're going to do interviews where you look at things in depth, maybe you should stick to three or four topics rather than try to do what we did, and we should have known better, but that's --

Another thing that didn't work very well, and I'm not sure why it didn't work, was we had a map and we asked people if there were special places in the area trying to get some

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sense of place issues, and that didn't work very well, either, and I don't know whether we asked too many questions, we didn't -- maybe we didn't develop the rapport we needed, but that did not work in this case, and really, it's the type of area where I'm sure there are special places for these people, but we were not able to collect that type of information.