

## **Summary of RMT discussion (3/28/05) on how to obtain final monitoring plan**

Members present for the teleconference were Jim Craig, Dirk Derksen, John Ford, Philip Martin, Eric Rexstad, Kim Titus and Dave Yokel. After the teleconference, Dave also received some e-mail input from John Schoen and Caryn Rea on this issue before they had the opportunity to see this summary, and some feedback on a draft of this summary from some of the members who teleconferenced. All of that is included here.

We began this discussion with a summary of all the options that have been suggested for obtaining our "final monitoring plan:

1. With little additional work, revise what we already have completed and call that the "monitoring plan" we were tasked to prepare by Henri Bisson. Then move directly to issuing RFQ's to do the actual work. The RFQ's could involve phases, with the first phase being to evaluate the approaches suggested by the RMT and providing a cost/benefit analysis and recommendations. After approval by the RMT, the next phase would fund the actual work.

2. Have BLM hire someone short-term to write the plan. This way it would be done in-house and have no consequence on future procurement for individual studies. (It may be difficult to find an individual with the necessary expertise to write the plan covering all 10 of our issues, and willing to work on such a temporary basis.)

3. Have BLM go a (major) step further and hire a permanent staff to implement the research and monitoring programs suggested by NPR-A planning documents. Their first task would be to finish the work on the monitoring plan, and then follow with its implementation.

4. Continue with the plan to advertise to GSA schedule 899 vendors in Alaska. This is a relatively short list, includes most if not all of the good choices, and is a relatively easy procurement process. There may be no good takers since whoever would be awarded this contract would be prohibited from competing for future field studies to implement the plan. Alternatively, one of the good vendors may take it on, but then BLM's future implementation efforts would be impoverished by having one less good vendor, out of an already short list, for implementation projects.

5. See if the Alaska Natural Heritage Program (ANHP; Environment and Natural Resources Institute, University of Alaska Anchorage) is capable and willing to finish the monitoring program.

6. Advertise nationwide, and hope that someone will bid and do a reasonably good job, and not be worried about exclusion from actual field projects by BLM in the future. This is a more complex, lengthy procurement process, and may result in a much larger number of bids than we want to have to evaluate.

There was general consensus that it would not be adequate to hand to BLM management what we have at this point and call it good (first part of option #1). Nor was there general support during the teleconference for the follow-up part of #1 (Caryn sent an e-mail "vote" for #1), although it was noted that we need to begin field studies sooner rather than later, and this may be the quickest way to go about it. However, the phased approach suggested in number one may result in the same procurement problem that initiated this discussion, and it may not produce a "comprehensive" plan for monitoring.

There was even less support (i.e. none) for option #6. Likewise, there was little discussion, and no real support, for option #4.

We briefly discussed an option not presented above, which was for the RMT itself to write the complete plan, or at least a sample chapter of it. While it was thought that the RMT does have on board the necessary (or nearly so) breadth of expertise to write a complete plan, the group members simply don't have the time, given their regular workloads.

An option not presented above would be to look for another monitoring plan in existence to use as a model for what we need to do, and use their methods to complete ours. Perhaps the closest thing to a suitable model would be the Northwest Forest Monitoring Plan, where they assigned several senior scientists, mostly Forest Service employees, to work on that plan and nothing else for several months. Writing their plan was "doable" and so would be ours; it just took several smart people and substantial time and money. But even that effort may not be a good model for what the RMT is producing, and in fact we may be plowing substantially new ground.

Another potential model is the set of draft monitoring protocols the National Park Service (NPS) has completed for a diversity of measures in Alaska. However, the NPS invested several years in developing these plans, and presumably considerable funding. It is unlikely that the BLM could pull from its current ranks enough people with adequate expertise and working roots in NPR-A issues, and give them the time and resources to complete our plan. It is also unlikely that a similar, but multi-agency, effort could succeed. Other agencies probably wouldn't feel the responsibility to contribute the necessary resources. Most importantly, perhaps, using these models would not be timely enough for the NPR-A where exploration is ongoing and the first development has already been planned.

There was a fair bit of discussion about #5, but it centered mostly on questioning whether or not ANHP would have the necessary expertise on board. Besides doubts about whether or not they could deal with social/cultural or contaminants issues, there was a question about whether or not they would have the quantitative skills to deal with reviews of past studies, including sampling design and power analysis, while suggesting what general methods have worked and which the BLM may choose to employ in the future. Also, one person had experience with a plan written by ANHP, and doubted that plan would ever be put to use.

One overriding problem with contracting any entity to write the plan would be adequately conveying to that contractor just what it is that the RMT wants. Since the RMT has had so much difficulty in clearly expressing that, both in its last meeting on 2/18/05 and in the subsequent statement of work for an RFQ, it is unlikely that any contractor would hit the mark. It might require a few to several people working full-time for maybe six months, using an iterative process of several submissions with (monthly?) RMT review and

comment before an adequate plan could be produced. This process would likely get more expensive than any contractor would have anticipated in preparing a winning bid.

Two names (John Wright and Ray Cameron) were offered as possibilities under option #2, but it was widely agreed that no single person would have the breadth of knowledge to write the plan for all 10 issues. It might require at least four different people with expertise in ecology (e.g. avian and mammalian), sociology/anthropology and toxicology. It would be the responsibility of the RMT to ensure that the various “chapters” of a monitoring plan written this way would address the same general goals and be readily merged into a single, comprehensive plan, using the iterative process described above. Since no one seriously discussed option #3 with BLM hiring a permanent staff for this and future plan implementation, option #2 seemed to be the closest thing to a general consensus for how to complete the plan.

Keeping in mind the need to begin collecting data ASAP, we need to have a complete plan by December, 2005, so we can immediately begin project planning and preliminary field work in summer, 2006. To achieve this, the BLM has to bring on board four or more persons (retired senior scientists?) by the beginning of June, 2005, which means they must begin the hiring process immediately to allocate funding, write job descriptions, advertise positions (in the Fairbanks and Anchorage areas only) and interview candidates before then. In addition, the RMT must commit the time to review the work of this new staff on a regular basis to ensure development of a complete and comprehensive monitoring plan.

Not given much discussion at this meeting was what the BLM would do with the new plan if it were completely successful in the above scenario. The agency would be faced with immediate implementation of the plan, presumably without any staff increase to carry out the project planning and implementation, or contracting of implementation. For this reason, it may be a mistake to discard altogether from consideration option #3, with BLM hiring a permanent staff for this effort and future plan implementation. If the work of the RMT is to evolve into an actual, comprehensive monitoring program, it will require oversight from BLM staff. It is unrealistic to assume that the RMT members, each of which has a full-time job outside of the RMT, can provide all the necessary oversight.