

involve a wide range of public involvement. To achieve this, and to comply with FACA, the Department has concluded that grazing advisory boards should be abolished and RACs created.

In accordance with the above discussion, the Department has concluded that the final rule should adopt provisions as proposed because these provide the best alternative for promoting cooperative relationships in resource management.

Section 1784.6 Membership and Functions of Resource Advisory Councils and Council Subgroups

In the proposal, the title of this section would have been changed for consistency with subsequent changes in §§ 1784.6-1 through 6-3. It would have referenced multiple resource advisory councils (MRACs), as well as rangeland resource teams and technical review teams.

A few comments were addressed to this section, but covered issues relating to the substance of the following sections. They will be discussed under the pertinent sections below.

Because the Department has concluded that the final rule should adopt a more flexible model for public participation than was envisioned in the proposal, it has changed this title to reflect the three model version of RACs adopted in final rule §§ 1784.6-1 and 6-2. References to rangeland resource teams and technical review teams are changed to "subgroups" for that reason, and "multiple" is omitted from the name of the RACs, as discussed at § 1784.6-1.

Section 1784.6-1 Resource Advisory Councils—Requirements

Under the proposed rule, this section would have provided for the establishment of MRACs. One MRAC has been established for each BLM administrative district except when prohibited by factors such as limited interest in participation, geographic isolation in terms of proximity to users and public lands, or where the configuration and character of the lands is such that organization of councils along BLM district boundaries is not the most effective means for obtaining advice on the management of all the resources across an entire area. The exceptions would have been intended to provide for situations such as those encountered in Alaska where it is difficult for interested persons to participate because of extreme travel distances, or situations where management of neighboring BLM districts or portions of districts involving similar lands can best be

served by organizing an MRAC along boundaries other than BLM district administrative boundaries. The determination of the area for which an MRAC would have been organized would have been the responsibility of the affected BLM State Director. Organization by ecoregion boundaries would have been encouraged where appropriate. The Governors of the affected States and established MRACs could have petitioned the Secretary to establish an MRAC for a specific BLM resource area.

MRACs would have provided advice to BLM officials to whom they report regarding the preparation, amendment and implementation of land use plans. The councils would also have assisted in establishing other long-range plans and resource management priorities in an advisory capacity. The Department intended that this would have included providing advice on the development of plans for range improvement or development programs and included in the proposed amendments to 43 CFR subpart 4120 a requirement for consultation with MRACs in the planning of range improvement or development programs. MRACs would not have provided advice on personnel management, nor would they have provided advice on the allocation and expenditure of funds subsequent to budget planning.

Appointments to MRACs would have been made by the Secretary. In making appointments, the Secretary would have considered nominations from the Governor of the affected State and nominations received in response to a public call for nominations. The Secretary would have encouraged Governors to develop their nominations through an open public process. In reviewing nominations submitted by the Governors, the Secretary would have considered whether an open public process was used. All nominations would have been required to be accompanied by letters of recommendation from interests or organizations to be represented that are located within the area for which a council is organized.

The Secretary would have appointed 15 members to each MRAC. Five members would have been selected from persons representing commodity industries, developed recreational activities, or the use of public lands by off-highway vehicles; five would have been selected from representatives of nationally or regionally recognized environmental or resource conservation groups and wild horse and burro interest groups, from representatives of archeological and historical interests,

and from representatives of dispersed recreational activities; and five would have been selected from persons who hold State, county, or local elected office, and representatives of the public-at-large, Indian tribes within or adjacent to the area, natural resource or natural science academia, and State agencies responsible for the management of fish and wildlife, water quality, water rights, and State lands. The proposed rule would have required that at least one of the members appointed to each council must hold elected State, county, or local office. An individual would not have been allowed to serve on more than one MRAC at any given time.

The proposed rule would have required council members to have demonstrated experience or knowledge of the geographic area for which the council provides advice. It would have required that all members of MRACs attend a course of instruction in the management of rangeland ecosystems that had been approved by BLM State Director. This requirement was intended to ensure a common general understanding of the resources management principles and concerns involved in management of the public lands.

The proposed rule would have provided that an official meeting of an MRAC required at least three members from each of the three broad categories of interests from which appointments were made. Formal recommendations of the council would have required agreement by at least three members of each of the three broad categories of interests that attend an official meeting.

MRACs would have had the option of requesting a Secretarial response where the MRAC believed its advice had been arbitrarily disregarded by the BLM manager. If requested, the Secretary would have responded directly to a council's concerns within 60 days. Such a request would have required agreement by all 15 members. The Secretary's response would not have constituted a decision on the merits of any issue that is or might become the subject of an administrative appeal and would not have precluded an affected party's ability to appeal a decision of the authorized officer.

The Department received many comments on this section of the proposal. Many commenters were opposed to the abolition of the grazing advisory boards. Comments on the grazing advisory boards have been covered above in the discussion of § 1784.6-5. Many were opposed to the formation of the MRACs. Others said that the proposed system was in direct conflict with the requirements for BLM