

to coordinate with State and local government in the decisionmaking process because the new system would be unwieldy and expensive. Some commenters stated that the councils would not bring about significant changes in the health of our public lands, but would perpetuate local control of public lands.

Other commenters were opposed to the MRACs because they said that the Federal agencies were being paid to manage the public land for public benefit, and they should do so. Some commenters charged that the Department was trying to subordinate or eliminate its legal obligations under sections of PRIA. Others stated that the public is involved in range decisions through the NEPA process and so MRACs were unnecessary.

Many commenters supported establishment of the MRACs. A typical comment stated they were an improvement over the grazing advisory board system. Several of the commenters who supported establishment of the councils suggested they be tried on an experimental basis.

Many commenters spoke to the make-up of the MRACs. Most of these commenters stated that ranchers would be under-represented. Some pointed out that the practical, ecological and managerial knowledge of permittees is essential, and that therefore they should be a required component. Some suggested that council membership should reflect the major users of the land in each specific area.

Some commented that it was discrimination to require environmentalists to be members of national organizations. Others said it was unfair to exempt the staffs of environmental organizations from the residency requirements which they believed were imposed on all other council members.

Many commenters spoke to participation of government employees on the councils. Some supported such participation especially by representatives of State wildlife agencies. Others were opposed to participation by government employees because they believed BLM would coordinate with such agencies anyway, and the councils should be for the government to get public input.

Some stated that prospective members should be supported by letters of recommendation from individuals and local associations of the area they would represent. Others specifically were opposed to the requirement for letters of recommendation. Commenters said that to require letters of recommendation from "local interests" would prevent the

councils from being balanced and violates FACA. One comment stated that because salmonids were so important in many areas, someone on the council should be knowledgeable of salmonids.

Other comments regarding membership addressed lending institutions, academicians, Indian tribes, and other specific groups.

Many commenters said that it was important for the MRACs to be made up of people who had local interests and knowledge, and stated that all members should be local. Other related comments addressed the need for local expertise, a financial stake in the land, and other factors. Some asserted that council members must share a primary commitment to improving grazing as a land use. Some of these same commenters asserted that all members should be required to demonstrate their knowledge of rangeland, vegetation, and livestock management, or related areas.

Many commenters were concerned with the process of selecting members. Suggestions included that members be elected by the permittees, or appointed by the county commissioners or the Governor. Others objected to their being appointed by the Governor or by the Secretary. Many commenters objected to self-nomination of individuals to the MRACs.

A number of commenters spoke on operation of the MRACs. Some stated that no expenses should be paid. Some suggested that strict standards on conduct and meetings should be developed to prevent one interest from dominating. Others suggested that recommendations from the local council should have some jurisdiction over the actions of the Federal land management agency. Some commenters stated that the provision prohibiting councils from providing advice on funding and personnel matters was too restrictive. Some objected to the Secretarial appeal provision. Several asked whether the MRACs would give recommendations or advice, or suggested that the advisory council serve as a reviewer of proposed decisions of the authorized officer. Some commenters raised a concern about the development and content of the charter, and about evaluation of the councils. Others were concerned about the requirement for consensus because they thought it would result in a serious delay in decisionmaking.

Some commenters spoke to the jurisdiction of the MRACs and how that would be determined. A number stated they should be based on BLM districts or on ecoregions. Some objected to the State Director being authorized to determine the area covered by a council.

A number of commenters spoke to council size. Some stated they were too large, a few thought they were too small. Some stated that the basic principle should be balanced and broad representation of public concerns, not a specific number. A number of specific recommendations for MRAC membership and size were made.

Numerous substantive suggestions were made for the course of study. Other comments included a statement that the proposal differed in several material respects from the products of the Colorado Working Group. Some commenters suggested that various terms be defined including ecosystem, biodiversity, environmentalist, rangeland ecosystem, historical and archeological interests, direct interest, dispersed recreational activities, insufficient interest, unbalanced viewpoint, nationally or regionally recognized, and ecosystem boundaries. Some commenters suggested that the MRAC should take no actions to which the permittees or lessees involved did not agree.

The Department's decisions to form the RACs and to abolish grazing advisory boards have been discussed at § 1784.6-5, as is the need for greater public involvement than that provided by the grazing advisory boards. General requirements of FACA, which have dictated a number of the provisions adopted today, are discussed at § 1784.2-1, Composition. Under the requirements of FACA, members of committees advising the Federal government must be appointed by the head of the agency, in this case the Secretary. State and local government will be included in the process through representation on the RACs, as well as being consulted on numerous specific types of decisions, such as on designation or adjustment of allotment boundaries (§ 4110.2-4), increasing permitted use (§ 4110.3-1), implementing reductions in permitted use (§ 4110.3-3), development of AMPs (§ 4120.2), and other BLM decisions. See the discussions below on those sections for additional information.

The Department has concluded that the new system will be workable and neither unwieldy nor excessively expensive. Obtaining input from all interested parties on BLM decisions early in the process will in the long run reduce objections and appeals. The Department anticipates that this will not only expedite implementation of agency actions, but concurrently will reduce overall rangeland management expenses by making the program more efficient. For example, the Department does not expect travel expenses to be