

Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group Meeting Record

1:00 – 5:00 PM, Wednesday, July 10, 2019

Butte Archives

ATTENDANCE

Members: Tony Colter, timber representative; Maureen Connor, citizen-at-large; Tom Harrington, motorized recreation representative; Nick Jose, timber representative; Karen Laitala, quiet recreation representative; Chris Marchion, hunting representative; Dave Stone, hunting representative; Commissioner Tom Rice, Beaverhead County; Darcie Warden, conservation representative; Commissioner Leonard Wortman, Jefferson County

Technical advisors: Cindy Perdue-Dolan, Office of Senator Steve Daines; Richard Stem, private consultant; Jeanne Dawson, Alex Dunn, Cameron Rasor, Jeff Tomac, USDA Forest Service

Facilitators: Ben Irely and Maisie Powell, National Forest Foundation

MEETING OUTCOMES

Decisions

- June meeting record was approved with amendment.

Action Items

- Ben Irely to send the group info about the Weeden Foundation
- Cameron Rasor to find out if the exploratory drilling results from Ham Gulch are public info
- Ben Irely to get link from Jeannie about more county partnerships for weed treatments
- Ben Irely to add more time for the District Ranger on the agenda
- Ben Irely to add a 1 hour block for a discussion about BDWG communication strategies to next month's agenda
- Members to come prepared to next month's meeting with specific communication strategy ideas

MEETING RECORD

1. Welcome, introductions, and approve agenda for today's meeting

Group members review the agenda and the Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group (BDWG) members review and approve June's meeting record.

2. Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest (BDWG) member updates

- Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) County training
 - Program revenue: the state is the only entity that can handle the funds if a county enters into a project that generates funding. The counties can only use appropriated funds if they are working with the Forest Service.

- Counties will not be receiving the 25% revenue off GNA but will use Secure Rural Schools (SRS) as a seed source. Any money generated can be spent on NEPA.
- Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) Subcommittee update
 - The subcommittee will reconvene on July 23rd at 10 am in Dillon. Today was a productive meeting with good info and discussion. There will be a request for proposals July 15th. The committee is open to new membership.
- Jefferson County Subcommittee update
 - Grazers identified potential areas for potential work to be done up in the Lowland Creek and Red Rocks areas.
- Other
 - The National Forest Foundation (NFF) found a grant that might be a good fit through the Weeden Foundation and plans on applying on behalf of the BDWG. Ben Irely will send the group information about the Weeden Foundation.
 - American Forest Resource Council (AFRC) field trip: The group went out to look at a GNA project. They visited the Gold Creek timber sale and learned about the economics behind this project and Forest Service (FS) appraisals. Attendees were interested to see the regrowth after a clear-cut.
 - The first phone meeting with the National Cadre was yesterday. This call included introductions and background info about the BDWG. Members mentioned the group having a goal of the BDWG becoming as effective as possible in helping the BDNF. There was also discussion of ensuring the Working Group's expectations don't exceed Forest's capacity. The next call is on July 23rd and anyone is welcome to join.

Congressional Updates

- Senator John Tester and Senator Steve Daines attended an open house at the Anaconda Job Corps on July 2nd.
- The Rancho Deluxe and Beal Mountain field trips were a success.
- Senator Daines is pushing for full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

4. Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest (BDNF) Ranger and Staff updates

- Pintler Ranger District Update
 - 2017 was a bad fire year for the Pintler District. The FS received \$1.6 million to work on trails and roads impacted by the fire. Crews carried in 300 pieces of bridge deck last summer and will match that this summer. Stringers for bridges were flown in last summer and this summer. Once completed, those bridges will last a long time.
 - There is an agreement with Granite County to complete road work using disaster funds. There was \$520 million spent on roads after the fire season. 41 miles of road and 58 culverts were repaired last year and the same will happen this year.
 - The range program has a vacancy. The Dry Cottonwood Allotment litigation has been taking up time. There are 40 allotments and 40 permittees on the District.

- Active timber sales: There are 6 active timber sales, but all are close to wrapping up. Gold Creek is in full operation. There is some road work on Gerard Perkins. Slide Rock Deck is moving slowly. East Fork by Iron Pine is close to wrapping up.
- Fuel Treatments: 60 acres have been treated and another 1200 acres are ready for treatment. In the Flint Foothills, the FS is trying to complete 200 acres per year for several years.
- Minerals: There are 6 active operations. There is a big drilling operation with Kinnecott up Ham Gulch. They are going through the NEPA process. Cameron Rasor will find out if exploratory drilling results are public info.
- The Job Corps is redoing Flint Creek campground and will hopefully be done next summer.
- The East Deerlodge Valley (ELRV) Restoration Project completed some tree felling on Perkins.
- NEPA is staged and the decision notice has been drafted for the Hogback and Meyers salvages. The lynx consult done, but still need to complete the bull trout and grizzly consultations. There has been no bulltrout documented in Meyers since the 90s. This will be wrapped up within the next week and the deadline to sell is August 6th. There are two sales with that, Deadwood and Molten Copper.
- The scoping is done for Rancho Deluxe, but the comments have not yet been addressed. There have been challenges with turnover for the wildlife biologist and the silviculturalist. A local biologist thinks there needs to be more data collection. The FS is hoping to issue a decision by September.
- Upcoming projects include Upper Willow Creek Salvage, range water treatments, lots of work at Discovery Mountain including solar panels and vegetation treatments, and Storm Lake.
- BDNF Leadership Team CFLRP Subcommittee update
 - A subcommittee has been identified and will convene to continue discussion.
- Staffing Update
 - The Regional Forester has elected two new Deputy Regional Foresters.
 - There will be a briefing for the Regional Forester on Monday for selection of District Ranger in Dillon.
- Other
 - Resource Advisory Councils (RAC): The regional offices are approving candidates. The committee is currently vetting applicants.
 - Recreation use is high and there are vacancies in recreation staff. The Forest is utilizing Montana Conservation Corps and AmeriCorps. There are capacity needs to administer heavily used recreation areas and campgrounds.
 - The Forest Plan lynx consultation is complete.
 - Red Rocks objections are being addressed and they are moving towards a decision.
 - This forest has a lot of projects under completed NEPA to do prescribed burn, 1,500 acres in total, but do not have the staff capacity to complete the projects.
 - There has been aerial spraying in Powell County and Beaverhead County. The FS is looking for other counties to get involved.

5. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) 101

- The aims of NEPA are to consider environmental impacts and to disclose environmental impacts to the public and involve the public.
- Section 102 is procedural and what is taken into account more in the courts. Section 101 is substantive and is generally not recognized by the courts.
- There is nothing in NEPA that states you have to select the option with the least environmental impact.
- NEPA “prohibits uninformed – rather than unwise – agency action.” Robertson Case
- The Proposal Development phase comes before the official NEPA process and is often called the NFMA phase. It is important to take your time in this phase to make the official NEPA process go more smoothly.
- If there are no significant effects, FS can do a Categorical Exclusion (CE) or an Environmental Assessment (EA). If there are significant effects, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) must be completed.
- The Washington Office and the Regional Office can update interested citizens on the most recent case law around specific issues.
- The length of process is not a NEPA process issue, but a Forest capacity issue.
- In this Region, the decision making authority is moving back to the Rangers.
- The public comment periods are scoping, the initial comment period, and objections. Objections must be based on previous comments and there is no objection period for CEs.
- The FS has discretion looking at comments and whether or not they align with the purpose and need of the project.
- BDWG initially had a goal of making the proposal development go more smoothly, but feels they haven’t been involved enough in the Proposal Development phase.
- To be added to the BDNF mailing list, contact leaf.magnuson@usda.gov.

6. Updated NEPA Rules

- There is a focus on more efficiency with increased use of CEs and clarification of terms.
- The section on Condition-Based Management gives discretion to Line Officers to apply completed NEPA processes to similar forest conditions in the same area.
- There are updates on scoping and public engagement on when it’s necessary to engage the public.
- CEs for restoration work, agency infrastructure, and others were added.
- There is an updated list of what requires an EIS.
- There is a 60 day comment period to respond to new NEPA regulations.

7. Possible communication partnerships between BDNF and BDWG

- The FS has questions about the best way for Forest to communicate messaging.
- The BDWG has limited resources (time), but want to know how they can help.

- The BDWG would like to be able to communicate what's happening with resources. The BDWG wants to help get the word out that the Forest needs resources – not that they don't know how to do the work, but that they don't have enough resources.
- BDWG should be looking at a compare and contrast between the BDNF today and 50 years ago. How has staffing changed, budget, projects, etc. Recreation is the way to engage and it is important to raise the value of that resource.
- Possible ways to communicate: Have a liaison, pair communication about FS projects with recreation resources (i.e. trail maps), letters to the editor, newsletters, move location meetings to places where projects are occurring, scheduled public meetings with the FS.
- This needs to be a two pronged approach. The regular FS communication program paired with what the collaborative can do.

Meeting adjourned at 5:09.

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