

Beaverhead - Deerlodge Working Group

Meeting Record

Metals Sports Bar and Grill, Butte, MT

January 10, 2018, 1:00 - 5:00 p.m.

ATTENDANCE

Members: Maureen Connor, at-large representative; Nick Gevock, wildlife representative; Nick Jose, wood products representative; Commissioner Mike McGinley, southern counties representative; Rick Sandru, agricultural representative; Chairman Dave Shulz, at-large representative; Darcie Warden, conservation representative; and Commissioner Leonard Wortman, northern counties representative

Technical Advisors: Alex Dunn, Melany Glossa, Betsy Herrmann, Dale Olson, Dave Sabo, Ian Shackleford, and Scot Schuler, USFS; Spenser Merwin, Senator Daines' Office;

Visitors: Mark Haggerty, Headwaters Economics; John Helle, Helle Livestock; and Chris Marchion and Dave Stone, Anaconda Sportsmen's Club

Facilitators: Ben Irey and Naomi Neal, National Forest Foundation

MEETING OUTCOMES

Decisions

- Approval of December meeting record
- Approval of BDWG Steering Committee's "Request for Support" and "Overview" documents
- Steering Committee authorized to send Congress a letter on behalf of BDWG in support of SRS funding

Action Items

- All in attendance should contact our senators and congressmen about the importance of Secure Rural Schools (SRS) funding
- Individual group members may wish to comment on the Forest Service's Environmental Analysis and Decision Making (EADM) by February 2nd deadline, but group will formally comment at later date.
- Send letter in support of SRS on behalf of Beaverhead Deerlodge Working Group (BDWG) to Congressional representatives (Steering Committee)
- Mail Overview and Request for Support to partners (Steering Committee)
- Outreach for funding to partner organizations (all)
- Amend Overview document in accordance with this meeting record and send to members along with the Request for Support (Ben)

Bin Items

- Comments on USFS EADM for streamlining NEPA process (group will comment once more information is available)
- Receive presentation on Planning Tools to Reduce Montana's Wildfire Risk by Kelly Pohl of Headwaters Economics
- Provide clarification on the membership protocols regarding alternates

MEETING RECORD

1. Welcome & introductions (*Dave Shulz*)

All in attendance introduced themselves.

2. Approve December meeting record (*Dave Shulz*)

December meeting record was approved by the Group.

3. Announcements and upcoming events (*Dave Shulz*)

- Wilderness Study Areas (WSA): Senator Steve Daines has proposed legislation to review and resolve wilderness study areas in Montana, which has been a divisive issue for decades. The Group requested clarification on what exactly the bill would do and clarification was given that the goal is for WSA use to be determined in accordance with agencies' recommendations.
- [See meeting materials: USFS News Release regarding their Environmental Analysis and Decision Making (EADM) change effort.] The group discussed a recent announcement by the Forest Service that it would be updating its EADM processes in order to increase efficiency. Public comment on the streamlining effort is already open, and members discussed whether it would be appropriate for the group and/or individual members to comment at this time. The group decided to wait to comment until more information becomes available and the process is further along.

4. Policy updates (*Congressional Staff*)

- A pilot collaborative project on hazardous fuels reduction is to be conducted in Region 1, further enabling collaborative approaches to decision-making in forest management.
- The Forest Service budget has yet to be determined by the appropriations process, but significant reductions are projected.
- [See the first bullet point under "Announcements and upcoming events"]

5. Rainbow chart review (*Alex Dunn*)

- The "rainbow chart" is Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest's (BDNF) five-year action plan of current and upcoming projects.
- One recent addition is the Meyers/Little Hogback Fire Salvage plan, which will sell off underburned Douglas fir over approximately the next eight months. The timber could be viable into next year, as the project does not have emergency status.
- The Fleecer and East Deerlodge projects are both delayed by pending judicial decisions.
- The Red Rock project's timeline has been affected by staff turnover, logistical challenges resulting from the involvement of outside groups, and disagreements over travel

management. The Regional Office will help push through decisions to move the project forward.

- The Red Rock, Greenhorn, and Pintler Face projects are all on similar timelines, with decisions expected in early 2019. The Pintler Face plan needs to be updated before that time, but only in terms of reassessing particular timber units; no sweeping changes to the overall process are anticipated.

6. National Forest Impact on County Economies around the BDNF (*Mark Haggerty*)

- Mark Haggerty of Headwaters Economics, a nonprofit in Bozeman, presented on rural communities, with the goal of providing broader context for how collaborative forest planning work can support local economies and communities.
- The first of Mark's three main points was that Montana's economy is growing quickly. Most of this growth is in the service sector and non-labor income, with other sectors being more volatile over time.
- The second main point was that this economic growth is uneven across the state. Almost all new jobs are in urban areas, increasing the preexisting economic polarity between urban and rural counties.
- The third point: These economic changes have implications for BDWG and its members. Mark identified protected public lands as a competitive advantage: counties with more of these lands grow faster and have higher per capita incomes. As rural county economies increasingly supplement the traditional agriculture/extraction model with income from tourism and recreation, they should reinvest this income in diversifying their economy and in infrastructure. Restoration is another new and valuable sector that can provide a path forward to the "conscious commodity" model. Managing these economic opportunities effectively makes county government operations essential to rural community survival. Mark and the group agreed that issues with federal payments to rural western counties must be resolved ASAP for counties to effectively plan for economic development.
- Following the presentation, the group members and other meeting attendees discussed Mark's ideas and economic development more broadly. One common concern was the question of how to translate the recreational value of public lands to county payments, particularly when lands' users are not county residents. Another thread was the need to balance economic growth with preserving rural community character and culture. The discussion concluded with the importance of stabilizing Secure Rural Schools (SRS) funding, the presence or absence of which defines the decision context for counties. Upon request, Mark gave a few ideas for resolving this, including ecosystem service value payments for federal lands, and the creation of a federal endowment, funded by public lands earnings, to pay for SRS long-term.

7. Update on court-ordered document re: bighorns in the Greenhorns (*Dale Olson, Melany Glossa*)

- Sheep grazing leases are one of the BDNF's largest economic contributions to local communities. In June 2016, in response to litigation intended to limit grazing on Forest Service land, a court order was issued stipulating that the Forest must review the potential for disease transmission from domestic sheep to bighorn sheep. This review has been conducted and reported on to the public, and the comment period closed at the end of 2017.
- The NEPA process will not be initiated because planned changes to grazing management do not rise to the NEPA level of significance. The review determined that proximity between bighorns and domestics has not increased since 2009 or earlier, and the Forest's Memorandum of Understanding on the sheep issue has successfully prevented commingling for roughly thirteen years. Best practices are already in place, and though additional monitoring will be conducted, everything seems to be working well already. Barring new information, these conclusions will be filed with the court at the end of this month.
- The court order also required that the Forest Plan Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) be revisited. This process is almost complete, and the Final Supplemental EIS will be distributed for public comment at the end of the month. If all goes smoothly, it should be complete and ready to submit to the court by the end of August.
- The process of generating and submitting these documents is running behind the court-ordered schedule. Requests for supplemental staffing from the regional USFS office have been unsuccessful, due to widespread funding shortages. It is unclear as yet how lateness might affect things, and whether there will be a penalty. Group members offered to help but no appropriate action items could be identified.

8. BDWG draft Request for Support and Overview documents (*Ben Irey*)

- The Request for Support and Overview documents were compiled by BDWG Steering Committee in order to facilitate communications and guide group activities. The Overview document provides a clear articulation of the group's mission and aims in order to enable self-evaluation of progress and success. It might also help to engage counties with the Working Group (it will be mailed to related counties' governments and to partner groups). The Request for Support document provides a synopsis of the group for a public audience and is intended to help solicit sustained, stable funding.
- There was a brief discussion of funding needs in response to this mention of fundraising. The BDWG needs \$12,000 for facilitation services, of which they have received \$5,000 from Sun Mountain Lumber. Members would like to have the Request for Support document available for making impromptu requests. There was some discussion of the prospect of asking counties and member organizations for financial support.

- The Steering Committee requested endorsement of both documents. There were two amendments to the “Overview” document: (1) the addition of the Greenhorn project under “Current Projects,” and (2) “Boulder River” was replaced with “Boulder Lowlands” and “Red Rock”. Both documents were voted on and approved by the group.

9. Meeting Closeout (*Ben Irey*)

- In a round-robin critique of the day’s meeting, members requested clarification of the membership protocols for alternates and representative attendees. Attendees expressed hopefulness, appreciation of Mark Haggerty’s presentation, concerns about funding, and the need for citizens to contact Congress about SRS funding.
- Public Comment Period: Commenters expressed concern about the lack of Congressional support for rural communities and sustainable Forest management, skepticism of new economic models, and frustration with tourism’s impacts on public lands and lack of contribution to their maintenance.
- Items for Next Meeting: A planned talk by Kelly Pohl will be rescheduled. Recreational uses of forest lands, clarification on the Daines WSA bill, and project updates will be included on upcoming agendas.
- Members voted to have the Steering Committee write a letter representing the group in support of SRS funding.
- Meeting Adjourned: ~5:00 p.m.