

**Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group
Meeting Record**

Butte-Silver Bow Archives, Butte

November 1, 2017, 1:00 - 4:30 p.m.

BDWG Members: Dave Schulz, Tony Colter, Rick Sandru, Tom Rice, Mark Thompson, Maureen Conner, Karen Laitala, Darcie Warden (by phone)

Forest Service: Derek Milner, Dave Sabo, Roger Anderson, Pam Fletcher, Scott Snelson, Scot Shuler, Betsy Hermann, Leaf Magnuson

Other: Caleb Hinkle, representing Congressman Gianforte; Danielle Tribble, representing Senator Daines; Chris Marchion, Anaconda Sportsmen; Coleen Michael, Montana Logging Association; Bryan Lorengo, Montana Logging Association; John Jackson, Beaverhead Commissioner

National Forest Foundation: Karen DiBari, Ben Irej, Jess Eller (University of Montana)

1. **Welcome and Introductions** (*Dave Schulz*)

2. **Public Comment:** none

3. **Announcements**

- K. DiBari: October meeting record will be sent out shortly and approved at the December meeting.
- Alex Dunn (BDNF) and his wife had a baby girl on October 20. BDWG shares its congratulations!
- S. Snelson: USFS Regional Team met two weeks ago, and the language used in the BDWG's letter in support of BDNF projects and fire salvage was repeated by the Regional Forester. Snelson thanked the group for the input and said that he thought their contribution was impactful.
- Fleecer draft notice is out for comment and closes on Monday.
- D. Schulz was contacted by a researcher from the University of Oregon who is doing a survey analysis for the USFS Washington office. His research questions looks at two aspects: what in the collaborative process helps to provide restoration success? and is the collaborative a part of that success? The report will be out in 4-6 weeks, and Dave will send out the report when he gets it. Karen DiBari and Tony Colter also spoke to the researcher
- K. DiBari: there is fire salvage meeting on Friday the region is hosting. There will also be meetings in Kalispell too.

4. **Congressional Policy Updates** (*Caleb Hinkle, Danielle Tribble, and Erik Nylund*)

- C. Hinkle: Congressman Gianforte co-sponsored the Westerman Resilient Forest Act, which streamlines the NEPA process among other things. The Act is being voted on today.
- D. Tribble: Senator Daines sponsored several pieces of legislation and is hopeful things will come together this fall. He is a new member on the Agriculture Committee. He also reintroduced the Cottonwood Bill (to counteract the litigation over lynx) and is working on other forest legislation.

- T. Colter read an email from Erik Nylund: Senator Tester introduced SB1842 Wildfire Disaster Funding Act. He's also working on other wildfire funding legislation and writing letters in support.
5. **National Forest Impact on County Economics around the BDNF** (*Mark Haggerty, Headwaters Economics*): M. Haggerty unable to make it due to snow. Topic has been rescheduled for the BDWG January meeting.
 6. **Planning Tools to Reduce Montana's Wildfire Risk** (*Kelly Pohl, Headwaters Economics*): K. Pohl unable to make it due to snow. Topic has been rescheduled for the BDWG January meeting.
 7. **Red Rocks Project Update** (*Dave Sabo, BDNF*)
 - D. Sabo gave a brief history of the project: the initial proposal was the Boulder Integrated Project encompassing 140,000 acres. That project was scrapped due to lack of funding and other issues. The Forest was able to do a Farm Bill CE on the Boulder Lowlands, which this group helped identify as a priority watershed. The landscape has been "loved to death." Boulder Lowlands is almost complete. All that is left is a little log haul. The openings on the landscape look perfect and really break up the monoculture of lodgepole pine. The BDNF is now working with the State on some Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) projects on private land adjacent to the project area.
 - M. Connor, C. Marchion, and D. Schulz all agreed that the BDWG should document, maybe via a mini-white paper, the result of that project and attach it to the initial BDWG Boulder Lowlands Landscape Vision Document. It is especially fitting to record the successes because this project was one of the first or second Farm Bill projects.
 - D. Sabo then continued with the project's next steps: the Farm Bill Strike Team was able to look at expanding areas for restoration around the Boulder Lowlands, which is where Red Rocks comes in. The June 30 field trip was a success, and over the summer the Forest worked on an in-depth scoping document but they lost a little momentum when the strike team leader, Tera Little, left her position this summer. Derek Milner is her replacement. Initially the project was about vegetation and did not include travel planning. In the public meetings hosted last spring and early summer, the BDNF told those that attended that travel would not be addressed and there would be no reduction of road density. After those meetings and with the addition of Milner, the BDNF realized that road management issues should be included in the plan. Because there are grizzlies and lynx in the area, US Fish & Wildlife specialists said that despite other improvements on the landscape included in the project, without addressing road density the project will most likely be litigated. The interdisciplinary team then went back to see what minimal changes (overgrown roads, roads with trees down, unused roads, etc.) could be made to reduce roads with minimal effect on current road use. Maintenance level 1 roads are closed off. Level 2 is a low standard, and level 3 is what most people are comfortable driving on.
 - The plan is currently proposed as a Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) Farm Bill environmental assessment (EA), which needs an actionable alternative. The travel planning additions will be included in the actionable alternative to fulfill this requirement. (Clarification: a regular environmental impact statement, or EIS, requires two options: action and no action; HFRA requires a third option: actionable alternative.)
 - The BDWG asked questions about road density standards based on elk security vs. grizzly bear habitat and timeline. The project timeline may be slightly adjusted/delayed as the BDNF addresses road issues.
 - Sabo next outlined timber harvest numbers: over 7,000 acres of treatment including 3,900 acres of timber harvest and 270 acres of aspen treatment. The timber harvest should make a perceptible impact on road conditions that stay open. C. Marchion gave a brief history of the Forest Service and road building.

- M. Thompson expressed concern over how the BDNF would communicate the new travel management additions to the public, and Snelson hoped the BDWG would help communicate the message by reaching out to their constituencies especially because this is a good opportunity to retain receipts. Thompson replied that he always assumed that was the role of BDWG members, but he had a few more questions before reaching out to others, such as if there would be more road reductions added to the plan. His suggestion to help remedy future surprises would be to bring people out to the landscape and find roads that could be closed and add them to a “bank” that could be drawn on for future projects. He knew six people off the top of his head that could help with this and then swing a lot of recreational users. Sabo did think the road reduction numbers would go up. Snelson thought the “bank” idea was an interesting one. Thompson and Milner both added that because of this project’s timeline (hope to have a decision by August 2019) that it wasn’t possible to start this “bank” idea now. Thompson offered to host a meeting with motorized users and invite the Forest Service to present, an idea the Forest employees present liked.
- Discussion for this topic ended with the sentiment that the timber is losing value. The Forest Service has a legacy of road building, and reducing road densities is a remedy being addressed now. There are certain requirements because the area is near bear protection areas and the travel management additions to this project will hopefully adequately address those requirements.

8. **Pintler Face Environmental Assessment** (*Pam Fletcher, USFS*)

- EA going out for public comment next week.
- P. Fletcher: USFS has had five public open house meetings with maps since she has been here, but they weren’t well attended. Most of the comments they received at the meetings were about travel management. She then passed out a summary of the proposed action to the BDWG while she emphasized that comments the BDWG have made are not considered in this draft EA. This EA was produced with comments they’d received up to February. The comments received since February will be put into the final EA.
- The BDWG had a few questions about grazing and allotments (Fletcher unsure of how many but knew that those groups had been contacted), the length of the comment period (30 days starting next Saturday, November 11), the size of the project area (just under 75,000 acres), and Alternative 1 (the no action alternative).
- R. Anderson, who is on the Pintler Face travel management team, discussed the potential conversion of some system roads to motorized trail. Some of the higher elevation roads can get a little rough, so it makes sense to maintain them as motorized trail, which is what they are used for mainly anyway. The only potential significant change to current use is the change in width restriction; there is currently no width restriction on the forest, but there would be on this project.
- M. Connor questioned how this project addressed elk security, especially because of current litigation on other forests around this topic. Fletcher confirmed that elk security has been addressed. They’ve been working with a MT FWP biologist, Vanna Boccadori, to look at screening some of the timber harvest from the road and research she’s done on elk movement. The EA draft also meets criteria for hiding cover. When the 450 page EA is posted online, the public will be able to use the “find” feature to search out terms like wildlife security.
- S. Snelson pointed out that the East Deer Lodge Valley (EDLV) Landscape Restoration Management Project took 10+ years to get out, and this project, Pintler Face, has taken only 2 years. He thinks this effort has been extraordinary. The BDWG agreed the effort has been commendable.
- K. DiBari asked if the group wanted to discuss or comment on the EA. The group referred it to committee. She will schedule a call.

9. **Carcass Management Program Update** (*Nick Gevock*): N. Gevock unable to make it due to snow.

10. **Future Meetings – Agenda Items**

December 6 – No Forest Service need to attend as the meeting is focused on internal BDWG process

- Action planning for 2018
- Membership: What are the interests currently represented by the BDWG? Where are there gaps? Discuss possible development of a membership recruitment strategy.
- BDWG evaluation survey results
 - Rather than verbal assessment discussions, the BDWG members expressed their support for responding to a survey as a method to provide feedback and also to give input on where the BDWG will focus its efforts next year. Jess and Ben will develop a surveymonkey.

January 10 (date changed from January 3)

- Headwaters Economics presentations
- Recreation activities and priorities on the BDNF including campground closures and accompanying statistics such as how many closed, costs, savings, etc. (supported by S. Snelson because of timeliness of conversation with budget presentation)

Future Meetings

- Update from the BDNF on the fire season: what burned, where it burned, why they did some of the things they did (like the fire line for the Meyers Creek fire)

11. **BDWG Funding** (*D. Schulz*)

- D Schulz shared that the funding need to support NFF facilitation of the BDWG has been just under \$11,000/year for the last 7 years. Funding under the state Forests in Focus program ends December 31, 2017. The Steering Committee met and is hoping to identify funds to cover more than just the coming year. D. Schulz offered to take to his state and private forestry contacts in Washington, D.C. He thought because collaboration is recognized as an important tool at that level there might be some funding opportunities there. This is an issue the group will need to discuss further; perhaps several entities can combine funds to continue facilitation.
- The group discussed that it would be helpful to put together another list of accomplishments because it is a valuable tool to do an assessment of what has been accomplished over the last 3, 5, or 7 years. This could be helpful for funding requests as well as orienting new members.

12. **Closing and a Farewell to Scott Snelson** (*Dave Schulz*)

- D. Schulz and the BDWG thanked S. Snelson for his dedication to the BDNF and BDWG. Several members spoke about the work Snelson has accomplished and the relationships they've built during his time on the BDNF. Snelson said he wouldn't have had the successes he did without his incredible staff. He invited all the BDWG members to visit him in his new post as the Spotted Bear District Ranger on the Flathead NF. The group enjoyed cake in Snelson's honor.

Action Items

- NFF (Karen) will work with the Pintler Face committee to schedule a meeting to discuss potentially developing comments on the draft EA.

- NFF (Karen) will draft a summary of accomplishments for review by the Steering Committee.
- NFF (Ben and Jess) will develop a survey to gather feedback from BDWG members as well as input on desired direction for the coming year.
- The Steering Committee will meet to discuss membership gaps and to work further on the funding issue.