

B-D Working Group (BDWG)

Minutes

Thursday, May 15, 2014

Butte-Silverbow Archives

1:00 – 5:00 p.m.

1. Welcome and approve minutes

Dave Schulz welcomed everyone to the meeting. The April 17, 2014 minutes were unanimously approved as written.

2. Public comment

No public comment.

3. Definitions of EIS, EA, CE

Peri Suenram gave a presentation about the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA; see ppt). She also recommended [A Citizen's Guide to the NEPA](http://ceq.hss.doe.gov/nepa/citizens_guide_Dec07.pdf) (http://ceq.hss.doe.gov/nepa/citizens_guide_Dec07.pdf) as a reference document.

Group discussion:

- Timelines
 - Specialists (botanists, hydrologists, archaeologists, etc. for example) go out to do surveys as they can fit it in with other work, so it is not a solid amount of time/focus on gathering data for a project
 - Litigation can delay timelines
 - No one knew offhand how the Forest Service Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process compares to other federal agencies.
 - Discussion about the length of time it takes to get to a decision when the public only has two 30-45 day periods to comment. New objections process provides an extra “bite at the apple”. EIS’ often have an extended comment period.
- Are there efficiencies that could be used in Boulder Lowlands and/or Selway Meadows?
Discuss up front about how to parcel work in order to find some efficiencies.
 - East Deerlodge Collaborative – may have suggestions to share based on their experiences
 - BDWG could compile best available science to help build that part of the EIS – good thing to add in scoping letters.
 - The BDWG has longer than average timelines for conducting NEPA processes – could the region help with funding? Melany Glossa: capacity is a long term investment and the Region is unlikely to be able to support. Conversations at regional level are more about streamlining, consolidation, and doing more with less.

- Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest (BDNF) is focusing efforts in FY14 to complete legacy projects.
 - Litigation
 - Within region, in the 1st round of responding to a lawsuit, the Forest Service is 40-60% effective in defending against litigation
 - Second round, 80% effective
 - If it gets to 3rd round, 100% effective
4. Selway Meadows presentation (*Jim Brammer*) – see ppt
- Potential integrated objectives
 - livestock grazing
 - timber production
 - roads and rec
 - aquatic resources
 - riparian/upland vegetation
 - wildlife resources
 - Western Pearl Shell Mussel
 - dependent on trout for reproduction (eggs and larvae attach to fish gills)
 - mussels live to be up to 100
 - are a native species
 - restoring the west slope cut throat trout (which are missing) would help the mussels; right now the age class is very old
 - Monitoring air temperature, water temperature, in four different locations – sustainable livestock management, riparian restoration, aquatic recovery – BDNF wants to make it a model
 - Timeline:
 - Begin data collection this summer
 - Phase 1: 2016 – 2017 to build barrier
 - Perhaps do a stewardship contract for timber; would need to package it correctly
 - Need to thoughtfully design how to do the analysis
 - Rule of thumb for group;
 - Identify suite of integrated activities
 - Then look at how to bundle
 - Field trip – Karen DiBari will coordinate with Melany and her staff to schedule a field trip to Selway Meadows for the July meeting
5. Categorical Excursion (CE) use/Farm Bill implementation in R1 and BDNF (*Melany Glossa*) and Update on Boulder Project and next steps

- The BDNF was asked to propose two projects to the Regional Office for consideration for categorical exclusion.
 1. Boulder Lowlands (selected for the following reasons)
 - Has been through rapid assessment so they have some background on it.
 - Suitable base
 - Not a fish key watershed
 - No bull trout, does have grizzly
 2. Pintler District- Maxville project – smaller than 3000 acres
 - CE regulations is still being developed so don't know what it will look like
 - Erik Nylund reported that at the end of May, the Chief plans to have a list of priority areas for landscape scale treatment areas
 - The BDNF is hoping the BDWG would be the collaborative to focus on Boulder Lowlands. 1500 acres harvestable timber. Dave Sabo hasn't had a chance to look at restoration opportunities yet.
 - There is no reason not to move forward with the project, regardless of whether it is analyzed through a CE or other NEPA tool. Maybe it makes more sense to do as an EA.
 - Group discussion
 - Jefferson County very interested in the Boulder Project. Would likely support the FS if they are litigated.
 - Need to look at integrated restoration options first, then determine NEPA tool and implementation strategy; maybe this is an opportunity to attract money to the project
 - BDWG members at the table supportive of trying to arrange a field trip to Boulder Lowlands for the June meeting
 - Forest Service may be interested in bundling categorical exclusions to help support multiple objectives; some discussion of pros and cons
6. Farm Bill Nominations, Tim Baker, Natural Resource Policy Advisor for Governor Bullock
- Governor nominated 4.9 million acres under the Farm Bill 2014
 - One of the big reasons Governor did it was to support collaborative efforts and to get more work done
 - Farm Bill seems to offer, through categorical exclusions, a useful tool
 - Governor's Office is talking internally and meeting with the Forest Supervisors to help the USFS achieve objectives
 - Governor is not interested in taking federal lands over, but is very aware of the frustration; Gov is more interested in working with federal land managers to help them become "better land managers and better neighbors". Talking about how to use state resources to help the agency achieve everyone's objectives in terms of money and staffing.
 - Yesterday the state signed a stewardship agreement with the FS for the 10-mile project. Expect it will be challenged.

- Governor is focused on a variety of approaches, not just the Farm Bill. Looking forest by forest to identify challenges. Wants to see projects that generate revenue and pay for themselves. Christine Dawe is working to assemble potential projects.
- Nominations process: Chief of the Forest Service will recommend landscape scale treatment areas to the Secretary of Agriculture. It is sounding like the Chief is taking much of what the Governors are giving him.
- With regard to lawsuits, can the BDWG do something to help? Should BDWG consider being intervenors? Answer: nothing but keep working locally.
- State is interested in what can be accomplished in a period of time to overcome institutional or legal obstacles. State is considering building a fund to put dollars into contracts for specialists to add staff capacity to the Forest Service. State is also considering putting money toward having a Montana Dept of Natural Resources person located in the Regional Office to focus on keeping collaborative efforts high-profile in front of the Forest Service and making sure they have what they need, plus find funds to help move projects along.

7. Outreach/communications plan (*Maureen Connor*)- 20 minutes

- BDWG as a collaborative did have an open process in the Farm Bill landscape scale treatment area nominations
- Need to improve communications with public outreach and constituency groups
- Potential Actions
 - “Road Show” to communities around the BDNF in next few months about BDWG vision, who the group is, prepare for project work
 - Much more negative press about the Farm Bill than positive. Should the BDWG do something about the Farm Bill? Or does that give the litigants more credibility? The current media messages right now are not helpful to the BDWG’s work. Discussion about pros and cons of direct response, but ultimate decision was against it and instead focusing on raising the profile of the BDWG.
 - Alternate meetings in different parts of the forest – Dillon, Boulder, Philipsburg?
 - Develop basic talking points; then identify outreach opportunities
 - Field trips this summer - identify people to invite to join
 - Invite an outdoor conservation writer from Lee newspapers to come to field trip and try to get a Sunday feature
 - Face to State TV program?
- NEXT STEP: Karen DiBari will organize a steering committee teleconference to discuss the communications plan further.

Meeting adjourned.