

**B-D Working Group**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
Thursday, February 19, 2015  
Butte-Silverbow Archives

Meeting objectives:

- Learn about 2014 Farm Bill NEPA processes and collaboration
- Identify next steps for Boulder and Selway Meadows
- Discuss outreach regarding BDNF budgetary needs, longer term planning

**Present**

BDWG Members: Dave Schulz, Barb Cestero, Paul Olson, Sam Samson, Rick Sandru, Leonard Wortman, Pete Nelson, Chris Marchion

Observers/Partners/Guests: Spenser Merwin (Senator Daines), Mo Bookwalter (Dept of Natural Resource Conservation), Rick Franke (Sun Mountain Lumber), Bob Zimmer (Greater Yellowstone Coalition), Abigail Dennis (Madisonian), Jake Maciag (Senator Tester), Zack Gambill (Representative Zinke)

Forest Service: Dave Sabo, Tera Little, Bruce Higgins

Facilitator: Karen DiBari, National Forest Foundation

1. Welcome, introductions and approve minutes - Dave Schulz opened the meeting. Everyone introduced themselves around the table. The group expressed their thanks to Barb Cestero for her service on the BDWG. Barb is leaving the Greater Yellowstone Coalition (GYC) and will no longer be participating in the BDWG. She brought Bob Zimmer to the meeting so he could become familiar with the group.
2. No public comment
3. Updates/ Announcements – The memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Montana Association of Counties and the Forest Service is being signed today. Dave Schulz suggested that MACo and the state of Montana put together a similar MOU.
4. State of Montana Forests in Focus Initiative - Mo Bookwalter presented information about the Montana Forests in Focus Initiative. (See attachments)
  - The impetus behind the FIF Initiative was some of the authorities authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill. In addition, funding was dedicated under House Bill 354 (2013 leg session); up to \$5 million from the fire suppression fund every 2 years, for up to 4 sessions for fuels reduction/mitigation and forest restoration. Funding availability will depend on draws to the fire suppression fund (driven by the severity of the fire season). This first pot of funding (\$3 million) is in the process of being spent. There is no guarantee for renewal.
  - 4 key “wedges”
    - Forest Restoration & Industry Retention (mill infrastructure, workforce training)

- Tribal, State & Private Forests – DNRC allocated \$2 million for work on private state and tribal lands (\$1 million in eastern MT, \$1 million in western MT.)
- Collaboration & Partnerships – adding a list of collaboratives to the webpage with contact information. Mo is open to ideas if there are specific things the state could do to support collaboration and partnerships
- Federal Forest Mgmt - \$1 million being allocated for work on national forests to accelerate restoration. The state has worked for years in partnership with the Forest Service (FS) on fire – this program and funding opens up new opportunities. Have received proposals from every national forest in MT, and are being reviewed now. Announcement on funded projects will likely be in March. Funding must be obligated by June 30, 2015. The grant period may be longer than one year. There needs to be a high level of accountability in delivering results in order to illustrate that this money well spent.
- The Forest Service and State of MT entered into a Master Stewardship Agreement last year. Since then, they have developed a supplemental agreement on the Red Mountain Chessman project (10 mile watershed). This is the first time ever that a state has signed a stewardship agreement with the FS, so it is a great learning opportunity. Mo is developing an interim report on the Chessman project and is interviewing people involved. That report will be coming out soon.
- Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) – made permanent in the 2014 Farm Bill. Allows for efficiencies between states and the forest service to collaborative across boundaries on similar projects. The DNRC provided input to the FS on the federal GNA templates
- Mo’s main role in her new position is to increase communications and partnerships with the USFS Region 1 and to represent the state’s interests.
- Link to interview on Home Ground Radio with the Governor, Faye Krueger, and Bob Harrington: <http://mtpr.org/post/new-cooperative-stewardship-agreement-between-montana-and-us-forest-service>

#### 2014 Farm Bill Authorities – Tera Little

- See attached information sheet.
- Under the Farm Bill, if a project meets certain criteria, it may qualify for a categorical exclusion (CE) (for example, no permanent roads are allowed, treated acres must not exceed 3,000, collaborative process required). Many projects were identified for the CE but don’t meet the criteria so are able to move forward under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) environmental assessment or environmental impact statement process, with reduced objection periods.
- Not many projects have gone through the HFRA process so it is not clear how the litigation process will work.
- Scoping of projects must be done by September 2018 for HFRA Title VI EA/EIS (CE authority is permanent)
- Funding for the Farm Bill could be improved with the FLAME Act. \$200 million was authorized for Farm Bill projects but not appropriated.
- The FS has received some comments about diameter limits – FS is using best available science for that ecosystem type.
- Discussion about how the primary driver of the CE purpose and need must be increasing resiliency and forest health in response to insect and disease, however hazardous fuels reduction/ fire risk reduction recognized and allowed. Other objectives can be identified as well.
- Lolo NF – had the first 2014 Farm Bill CE in the nation – 130 acre project. FS held field trips, one public meeting.

- Idaho Panhandle National Forest – Jasper Mountain Project: project is just going through scoping. Over 2000 acres treatment is likely. Had a 2 hour public meeting, ½ day field trip to areas with similar treatments conducted 6 years prior (to show desired conditions), then a 1 ½ day workshop that focused on the purpose and need development. The FS added a last-minute public meeting to address some outstanding issues.
  - Some proposed units were dropped due to the viewshed.
  - Road improvements are included – important to stakeholders.
  - The Panhandle Forest Collaborative commented through scoping.
  - Region 1 put funds in early on and supported with an ID team (led by Tera Little).
  - Best practices: The workshop engaged the full ID team. They only held meetings at critical stages. Tera kept the meetings focused and short. Maggie Schenk (formerly Pittman) facilitated the meetings. Holding extra meetings when needed helped remove conflict over issues that could have bogged down the project. Posted notes quickly on the FS public webpage in order to keep information sharing open and relevant.
  - Running an ID Team for one year costs \$800,000 – so frontloading engagement of the ID Team and streamlining the process is a way of “making wise investments up front” to save on overall costs.

#### 5. Boulder Lowlands update and identification of next steps

- Dave Sabo expressed his excitement about working with the BDWG on Boulder Lowlands (BL), and thanked the group for taking the lead on the Farm Bill nominations package.
- Staffing on BL:
  - Dave Sabo – BDNF contact for BDWG (Peter Nelson is the BDWG’s contact)
  - Melany Glossa – deciding official
  - Bruce Higgins– ID Team leader (with TEAMS, an internal FS enterprise unit; has 125 employees; provide services to FS units; does not have any appropriated dollars but is paid on a fee for service basis by FS units; like a temp services operation. The TEAMS ID team members were all involved in the Boulder project previously. The soils scientist is based out of Missoula – others are out of state and will work remotely for the most part with some visits. Do not have to work on fires so staffing is available through fire season.)
  - Tera Little – “coach” and support for Bruce and team
- Melany Glossa is very committed to getting the project done in a timely fashion
- The FS has determined legally that Boulder Lowlands is in the Wildland Urban Interface, because it is in the WUI as defined by the Community Wildfire Protection Plan.
- The FS has an obligation to reach out to local residents/permittees. The BDWG offered to help identify local people who may be interested in the project, and even hold a meeting in Boulder or another location to enable the FS to communicate about the project with the communities.
- The group discussed how in the past, the BDNF has asked the BDWG to support projects in which the group had not engaged, and the BDWG wasn’t able to do that. The BDWG is interested in getting involved deeply in this project and helping the FS engage with other constituencies. The BDWG has a strong interest in seeing the Boulder Lowlands project “work” in terms of incorporating public input, benefitting from BDWG engagement and testing the group’s lodgepole guidelines.
- Next steps:
  - BDNF staff will develop a public engagement and project timeline in late February, and will get back to the BDWG about scheduling a Boulder meeting
  - BDWG will identify expectations to share with the BDNF (one expectation already identified: provide input into the purpose & need)

- Pete Nelson will share the BDWG lodgepole guidelines with Bruce Higgins and Dave Sabo.

#### 6. Selway Meadows update and identification of next steps

- Rick Franke, Chris Marchion, Paul Olsen, and Tom Rice participated in a meeting with Peri Suenram and Scot Shuler.
- The fisheries plans are taking shape in terms of irrigation management through a CE.
- The FS is also implementing roadside salvage/hazard removal work this summer, along with culvert replacement and maintenance (also a CE).
- Roger Peters, a rancher, holds the allotment and the FS has been communicating with him about the irrigation issues, which are likely to be challenging. The FS holds the water rights now.
- The committee and the FS are discussing how to design an integrated project that addresses the issues in the larger landscape. Idea: to help preserve the important elk calving area in the valley, could timber harvest be done in a way to provide openings that still maintains critical security for calves and forage. The elk move into Idaho in the fall during hunting season. Also could work to disperse grazing activity.
- Selway Meadows analysis likely to start in 2017.
- The Nature Conservancy (Nathan Korb) is very interested in this project and may have funding to invest.
- NEXT STEP: Set up a meeting with the Forest Service, the committee, and fisheries and wildlife biologists from Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks. Potential dates are March 4 or 10.

#### 7. Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest budget discussion

- BDNF has their estimated budget right now, but it is \$250,000 short.
- A question was asked about whether the BDNF has a standing ID Team. Dave Sabo explained that due to budget declines and attrition (vacancies are not being refilled), there is no ability to have a standing ID Team.
- Discussion about actions the BDWG could take to influence the budget situation. Comments that the Boulder Lowlands project is an excellent opportunity to prove what is possible on the BDNF, and to turn the tide and get projects moving forward.
- NEXT STEP: Dave Schulz will draft a letter from the BDWG to the delegation to communicate 1) appreciation for having congressional staff attend BDWG meetings and adding a standing item for updates on congressional activities to the beginning of the agenda; 2) the BDWG looks forward to working with the delegation; 3) support for the \$200 million for 2014 Farm Bill implementation on NFs, and 4) support for resolution of the drain on the FS budget caused by how fires are handled (FLAME Act).
- NEXT STEP: In follow up to the January meeting in Dillon, Tony Colter is going to talk with Melany about getting the budget totals for the past 10 years or so for the BDNF, as well as any visitation/recreation info that is available.

#### 8. Membership issues

- Barb Cestero leaving; Bob Zimmer is available to fill in from GYC
- ACTION ITEM: Karen DiBari will check in with Joe Willauer about whether he thinks he can participate.

#### 9. Next meeting agenda

- Add policy updates as a standing agenda item at the beginning of meetings
- 5 Year Action Planning/Program of Work – Melany Glossa
- Boulder Lowlands update and discussion

- Selway Meadows update and discussion
- BDNF budget

10. Member Announcements – Leonard Wortman commented that the Chessman collaborative group is having someone travel in to provide expert information and he suggested that the BDWG try to take advantage of the opportunity of that person visiting. Leonard and Karen DiBari will follow up.

11. Meeting adjourned.

ACTION	WHO
BDNF staff will develop a public engagement and project timeline in late February, and will get back to the BDWG about scheduling a Boulder meeting	Dave Sabo
BDWG will identify expectations to share with the BDNF (one expectation already identified: provide input into the purpose & need)	Pete Nelson, BL Committee
BDWG will share the BDWG lodgepole guidelines with Bruce Higgins and Dave Sabo.	Pete Nelson
Set up a meeting with the Forest Service, the committee, and fisheries and wildlife biologists from Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks. Potential dates are March 4 or 10.	Tom Rice
Draft a letter from the BDWG to the delegation to communicate 1) appreciation for having congressional staff attend BDWG meetings and adding a standing item for updates on congressional activities to the beginning of the agenda; 2) the BDWG looks forward to working with the delegation; 3) support for the \$200 million for 2014 Farm Bill implementation on NFs, and 4) support for resolution of the drain on the FS budget caused by how fires are handled (FLAME Act).	Dave Schulz
In follow up to the January meeting in Dillon, talk with Melany Glossa about getting the budget totals for the past 10 years or so for the BDNF, as well as any visitation/recreation info that is available.	Tony Colter
Check in with Joe Willauer about whether he thinks he can participate.	Karen DiBari
Coordinate with the Chessman Collaborative about the expert speaker who is visiting and try to schedule for the BDWG.	Leonard Wortman/ Karen DiBari

**2015 Scheduled Meeting Dates (generally 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of the month):**

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| • March 19, 2015 | • August 20, 2015    |
| • April 16, 2015 | • September 17, 2015 |
| • May 21, 2015   | • October 15, 2015   |
| • June 18, 2015  | • November 19, 2015  |
| • July 16, 2015  | • December 17, 2015  |