

Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group

Draft Meeting Record

Thursday, March 16, 2017

Butte-Silverbow Archives, Butte

1-5pm

BDWG Members: Dave Schulz, Tony Colter, Rick Sandru, Maureen Conner, Leonard Wortman, Karen Laitala, Nick Jose

Forest Service: Scot Shuler, Molly Ryan, Dave Sabo, Jeff Shearer, Meghan Oswalt, Tera Little, Clint Kolarich, Diane Probasco, Andy Kies

Facilitator: Karen DiBari

Other: Neil Simpson, DNRC; Jessica Eller, University of Montana

1. Welcome and introductions

- Dave Schulz opened meeting; all at table introduced themselves.
- January meeting record was approved without changes.

2. Public comment: none

3. Announcements

- Dave Schulz was asked to join the Governor's Transportation Commission. He's waiting to be appointed by the Senate.
- Karen DiBari introduced Jessica Eller, from the University of Montana's Natural Resource Conflict Resolution program, who is here as facilitator support.
- Scot Shuler introduced the collaborative workshop being hosted by the High Divide Collaborative later this month. This year's themes are working ranch lands and recreation, communities and economics, and forests and landscapes. They are looking for speakers for 1-1.5 hour presentations. There are upcoming conference calls to flesh out ideas. Scot can get more info to anyone interested via Karen.
- Molly Ryan briefly introduced herself and her new role with the Forest Service (FS) as the Wise River District Ranger.
- Dave Sabo announced that Charlene Bucha accepted a new position in the Philipsberg office with Enterprise Teams.
- Meghan Oswalt introduced herself as the new Regional Collaborative Coordinator. She'll be focusing on collaboration both internally and externally and a new liaison with the FS and collaboratives.
- Leonard Wortman full disclosure: Michael Garrity wrote a letter to the Independent Record and Leonard responded as commissioner not a BDWG member.

4. Congressional policy update: none

5. Membership

- Maureen Conner initiated a discussion on membership - should active members be voting members? Karen DiBari provided context to the group: wood products representatives have been Tony Colter and Rick Franke; with Rick on sabbatical, Nick Jose has been at meetings in his place. Maureen moved that Nick Jose be a voting member; Leonard seconded. Vote: unanimous yes.
- Maureen would also like the steering committee to look at membership and make sure that all interest groups are covered.
- Last meeting, the group voted to ask Darcie Warden to fill the seat on the steering committee. Dave talked to her; she accepted.

6. State legislative update (Nick Gevock/Brian Ohs via conference call)

- Two bills of interest HJ9 and HB38. HJ9 was introduced by Rep. Kerry White to release wilderness study areas (roughly 663,000 acres). Discussion followed about the history of wilderness study areas and the potential effects on collaboration and the BDWG if the resolution passes. Nick informed the group that the Custer Gallatin Working Group had sent in a letter against the resolution and asked the BDWG to do the same. Due to varying viewpoints on HJ9, the group did not take action on submitting a letter against the resolution.
- Other congressional activity announcements included:
 - Fire funding (HB2), which is on the floor today. Speculation is there will be cuts.
 - Montana Wildlife Federation (MWF) has opposed the resolution HJ15 to de-list the grizzly bear because it called for bypassing the process of the Environmental Protection Act.
 - SB281, concerning the fire suppression account, has moved to House Committee. It requires that if there is over a certain amount of money in the account it be pulled and moved to other areas; collaboratives are one of those areas.

7. Budget issues

- Scott Snelson absent due to family reasons; Scot Shuler asked group to postpone budget discussion until Snelson is back.
- Dave Sabo gave a brief overview of FS budget handout before budget issue discussion was tabled until Snelson's return.
 - FS fiscal budget runs from Oct 1-Sept 30. FS is in the Dept. of Agriculture, which is under the President. In January, the President gives the State of the Union. In early February, he provides Congress with his budget for the next fiscal year (FY). Congress then cuts/amends/passes budget. FY17 was never passed; it's a continuing resolution, which means they use the previous FY budget until Congress can pass a new one: "kicking the can down the road." The continuing resolution lasts until April, but rumor is that the budget will be the same, even when it is officially passed. President Trump will give the FY18 budget soon.

- FS budget creation process: Chief goes to Regions for a budget; Regions go to forests; forests track outputs then provide a three-year budget. The last few years, the Chief's budget and the region's budget have been close to the same, i.e. what they ask for is what they get.
- The total FS budget is \$5.5 billion; B-D is \$13 million. Permanent employees before the Beaverhead and Deerlodge combined: 420 employees.
- The B-D budget last year was 30% discretionary, 70% fixed. The 30% discretionary provides a little bit of flexibility and is a good percent.
- Scot Shuler cautioned the group that when looking at the numbers to keep in mind the process changes a lot. For example, in 2017 the materials and supplies budget was a lot higher, but that might have just been because they started tracking it differently or undertook a new process to estimate that number.
- FS also stressed the following items:
 - They haven't actually seen a \$1 million reduction, but have seen that the regional manager is actively working to bring money back to the Forests and the ground.
 - There have been value-added bonuses, like the Farm Bill Strike Team and the Montana-Dakotas NEPA Strike Team (\$800,000 value for one year of a NEPA team - funded out of the federal office).
 - The regional office has the same budget struggles, so a better strategy (rather than direct solicitation of more funds by the BDWG) might be to support the programs that are working. Writing letters in support of Farm Bill projects is a stronger message.
 - The FS strives to be more productive and proactive in their forest and as that happens those dollars (the budget) are going to go up. It starts in the counties and the communities; they need to work with the FS to provide range families, etc. to keep these towns alive and maintain the need for the FS.
- The group agreed to table the discussion until Scott Snelson is back.

8. Red Rocks project

- Preparation for evening public meeting: Tera Little outlined the format (chair and table set up) and plan for the evening public meeting. She was unsure how many people would be attending. Initial meetings in other communities had 25-35 attendees. Both Dave Sabo and Tera thought that the Boulder meeting in May would be much better attended based on public's feedback and the location closer to the project area. BDWG members had several follow up questions, specifically about public/FS interactions during the meeting, which Tera and Dave addressed.
- Elk security and wildlife issues: Diane Probasco shared current elk population statistics (500-550 elk currently) and wintering areas, which are different than other elk herds in Montana. FS is in early discussion with Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks to determine best management plans for elk. Design features *could* include: strategic cutting of timber subunits, reserving hall routes for elk travel, and timber cutting timing restrictions around important hunt openings. Tera and Diane both stressed that they wanted this plan to be implementable and specific.
Discussion followed about the density of roads in the area. Diane stressed they would not be changing or discussing road closures for this specific project.
- May 18 meeting and field trip: Tera mentioned there might be potential for a Saturday field trip as well if the public desired. That question will be decided after the public meeting that evening (decided on a Friday morning field trip).

9. Elk management issues: addressed above, group requested to move to next agenda item.

10. Committee/Project updates

- Pintler Face (Molly Ryan): There have been some changes that are affecting projects (staff on maternity leave, etc.) but there are field trips planned once the snow melts. They want to get some public/working groups involvement and are hopeful for a draft in May. Overall, things are still moving forward.
- Selway Meadows (Scot Shuler): Committee is continuing to work on refining the vision and landscape strategy. Scot and a few other subcommittee members missed the last meeting. The next meeting is March 27. Overall, the committee is still moving forward and looking forward to the next meeting.
- Greenhorn (Clint Kolarich): FS sent out over 150 postcards and had 10 people show up (20 people on the mailing though, some couldn't make it). FS has been busy in between meetings doing what they said they would do: a standard EA as efficient and flexible as possible. They had a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request from the Native Ecosystems Council (Sara Jane Johnson), which is unusual this early in the process. Tera expects a FOIA from the same group right after the public comment period.

11. Review of April agenda items

- APRIL: Budget review (Scott Snelson) including how to position BDF to maximize receipts
- JUNE: Clint Kolarich would like to lead the BDWG through a 2-hour discussion in June: "Improving Lives." The Washington office wants to improve communication in their agency. Going into the next 100 years, is the agency staying relevant? Serving people and stewarding lands as effective as they can? Dialogue with people across region. 2 hour process. Want to do internal and external.
- 2017 Schedule of Activities – see attached document

12. Upcoming meeting dates

- April 20, Butte
- May 18, Boulder
- May 19 Field Trip, Boulder