

B-D Working Group

Draft Meeting Record

Thursday, May 18, 2017

Boulder Volunteer Hall, Jefferson County Fairgrounds

1:00-5:00 pm

BDWG Members: John Kountz, Leonard Wortman, Darcie Warden, Nick Gevoch, Nick Jose, Tony Colter, Mark Thompson, Maureen Conner, Karen Laitala

Forest Service: Kevin Weinner, Betsy Herrman, Melany Glossa, Alex Dunn

National Forest Foundation: Karen DiBari Ben Irey, Jessica Eller

Other: Matt Arno, DNRC; Neil Simpson, DNRC; Chris Marchion, Anaconda Sportsmen; Dave Stone, Anaconda Sportsmen; Gary Carlson, Carlson Ranch; Sam Samson, citizen; Quentin Kujala, Montana FWP

1. Welcome and Introductions

- Tony Colter opened meeting; all at table introduced themselves.
- March meeting record was approved without changes.

2. Public Comment: none

3. Announcements

- Karen DiBari introduced Ben Irey, the new staff member at National Forest Foundation and experienced facilitator who might be sharing facilitation responsibility, and reintroduced Jessica Eller, from the University of Montana's Natural Resource Conflict Resolution program, who will be continuing to make calls to BDWG members to check in.
- Karen Laitala read from Erik Nyland's email about Senator Tester's support for the FY17 Appropriation Omnibus. Melany clarified, stating that it was a good thing for fire but funds will have to come from other areas. The federal hiring freeze has been lifted, but each department must now develop reduce and redesign plans to cut employees. Until these plans come out in July, there is essentially still a hiring freeze, which means that positions that aren't filled won't be filled until then. Chris prompted for educating the public on the budget deficit, and Melany added that she was hopeful that people do understand that with the budget cuts there are cuts to how they manage lands. FS is in discussion at the regional level about how to engage with the public. Tony and Chris began discussion on the economics of the timber industry in relationship to the federal lands, and Karen D. suggested flagging the discussion for an upcoming meeting.
- Alex Dunn announced the hiring of a new collaborative restoration manager. She's coming to the FS after getting her degree at the University of Washington in Forestry and Environmental Science. Her position is adding to the FS capacity.

4. Congressional Policy Update: discussed in the Announcements

5. Membership

- Karen DiBari has received a few emails from BDWG members apologizing for not being able to attend the past few meetings and asking if their presence was still wanted/needed. Karen has replied: yes. The group agrees that all members are valuable to the working group and their presence is both wanted and needed.

6. State Legislative Update (Nick Gevoch/Neil Simpson)

- Nick G. updated the group on the following items that were of importance to Montana Wildlife Federation and might be of interest to the group:
 - HJ9, the resolution supporting the release of wilderness study areas, was amended to instead ask for the resolution of those areas and to make wilderness potentially an option.
 - HJ15, the grizzly bear delisting resolution, was also amended. It now urges FWS to delist. Nick G expects Yellowstone delisting in July, which will affect BDNF.
 - SB73, providing funding for ranchers for carcass removal, which was sunsetting this session, has been renewed. It was a statutory appropriation and had no opponents to the bill, but it was a tight budget year, so it's not a lot of funding. Funding will again expire in 2019 so it will have to be readdressed then. Nick is working on carcass management to prevent conflicts with wolves and grizzly bears.
- Neil S. discussed the funding of his and Matt's position within Forest in Focus. Both positions were funded again. The one-time only funding on Matt's position as DNRC Local Government Liaison was removed, so his position is fully funded (with a few qualifications) moving forward. The funding for Neil's position as DNRC Forest Liaison was only renewed until next session. He also talked about the following bills:
 - SB281 and SB261 conflicted removing excess funding from the fire suppression fund.
 - HB3 & SB363, funding for aquatic invasive species, passed.
 - HB228, sage grouse funding, passed.
 - SB342, the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) account, passed which brings GNA to the forefront in hopes that it grows into something bigger. Melany mentioned a phone call on the GNA between the State and BDNF, which is an opportunity to share work and funding across state and federal lands which means more work getting done on the ground. Neil followed by mentioning that DNRC is developing a supplemental agreement on the BDNF. When completed, it might be a good time to present to BDWG and refresh the group on the GNA.

7. Elk Management in Montana (Quentin Kujala)

- Quentin K. presented on some of the current science and data used for elk management in Montana. One of the main questions, not the only question, but a big piece of the department's focus is how to get hunters to elk. Both state law and public are directing FWP toward that focus. What they've found is that although 85% of elk hunts are on federal land, only 14% success = a lot of hunts but not much success, which then leads to hunter dissatisfaction. Of those polled 33% are satisfied (the lowest level of satisfaction across species) and 35% are dissatisfied (highest dissatisfaction across species). Hunts on private land are much more successful.

- Some of the characteristics FWP has been researching are hunter access to elk or properties, security of elk habitat and elk distributions. They also are looking at the characteristics of a place that encourage elk to stay, such as if what is holding elk there has to do with the draw of the place itself or a distraction from previous habitat.
- Quentin passed out several handouts and accompanied each with a brief explanation. Those handouts, available on the Montana FWP website are:
 - “Fall Elk Distribution in the Missouri River Breaks”
 - “Evaluating Elk Summer Resource Selection and Application to Summer Range Habitat Management”
 - “Security Areas for Maintaining Elk on Publicly Accessible Lands During Archery and Rifle Hunting Seasons in Southwestern Montana”
 - “U.S. Forest Service and Montana Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks Collaborative Overview and Recommendations for Elk Habitat Management on the Custer, Gallatin, Helena, and Lewis and Clark National Forests”
 - “Elk Refuge Areas and Their Impacts”
 - “Elk Movements in HD314”
 - “Private Land Management Decisions and Elk”
- A point was made several times about the resiliency of elk - the “elk seed” metaphor. They are tolerant of human behavior and have an ability to get used to human presence.
- Members then asked about the influence of predators on elk distribution. Quentin answered there was certainly an influence from predators but that most investigations come to the conclusion that there is an effect within the seasonal range no correlation or effect on big seasonal range adjustments. Basically predation is always there, so the elk moving doesn’t seem to be directly because of predators.

NEXT STEPS:

- Invite regional or local biologists to BDWG meetings when appropriate, such as the Pintler Face biologist to the July meeting, to continue discussion on elk habitat and management.
8. Big Hole Divide Landscape Strategy
- The Selway Meadows landscape vision document which originally focused on water and irrigation was broadened by the committee to the Big Hole Divide Landscape. The current landscape contains the head of the Big Hole and Beaverhead Rivers. It is connected by four road systems provided options for timber haul. The bigger landscape also opens up wildlife and timber opportunities.
 - Kevin W. suggested adding another bullet for non-commercial vegetation treatment (aspen, for example) for wildlife resiliency.
 - Discussion followed about the importance of finesse and balance in decisions and document wording, for example areas that could be targeted for willow restoration for fish could also be important recreation sites for families.
 - Kevin W. gave the group kudos, especially Tom Rice, for their help reaching out to private landowners to allow FS to install head gates to help control water flow and movement.
 - Discussion moved on to livestock and the potential of beginning dialogue with adjacent land owners/managers. There are big differences between federal and state management, which has

created conflicts with ranchers and been a problem on the landscape. The group proposed adding “engage and identify stakeholders on the landscape” to the general goals of the document to remind them to continue to initiate dialogue with those stakeholders. They also recognized the importance of pursuing cross-boundary cooperation with contiguous landowners.

- In the wildlife resources category, the group discussed the fluid definition of habitat and elk security briefly before deciding to broaden their addition to this category to include seasonal wildlife use patterns and compatible management to maintain diverse habitats for a variety of species for a variety of species.
- Wording was rearranged in the vegetation category, and timber was moved into this category. The discussion of the document ended, because of time, on the idea to address vegetation that isn’t forested in the final document.

NEXT STEPS:

- Members will review the draft Big Hole Divide Landscape Strategy and bring suggestions to the June meeting.

9. Carcass Removal and Composting Programs (Nick Gevock)

- The best example to date is in the Blackfoot Valley where conflicts have been reduced by 93% (with a grizzly bear population of 40 year round bears). They have a composting facility in Clearwater Junction and a truck that runs during calving season picking up dead cows. The facility also takes around 300 whitetails a year. The carcasses break down to nothing in 45 days.
- Nick wrote a grant to provide funds for gas and staff to start cleaning up carcasses in the Centennial Sage Creek area with support from the Big Hole Watershed Committee, and the National Wildlife Federation matched the funds. The truck brings carcasses to Wisdom. Nick hope that his will be a model for future facilities and removal programs as grizzlies begin to move out of Yellowstone more and more.
- He is currently writing another grant that Centennial Valley Association will reimburse. He sees potential for future programs in Red Lodge, Carbon, Beaverhead, Madison, Pondera, and Glacier. He is more than willing to help find funds but stressed the importance of each of these efforts being locally driven.
- Maureen echoed how the program in Drummond, which Blackfoot Challenge was instrumental in starting, works really well. The program in Drummond had support because grizzly expansion maps showed future movement to that area.
- Nick closed by mentioning the wealth of potential funding sources such as Montana Dept of Transportation, FWS, Montana FWP, and private conservation groups that all might be willing to chip in a little.

10. Committee/Project Updates

- Pintler Face (Alex Dunn): Pam is compiling the EA, which should go out for comment in late June/early July. Public meetings in Dillon, Butte, and Wisdom will follow in early July with a 30 day written comment period. A public field trip in July is being planned; BDWG members are invited. A June field trip for sportsmen is being planned; BDWG members are also invited on that trip.

- Greenhorn (Alex Dunn): The FS held a public collaborative meeting in Sheridan. Opportunity areas have been identified for treatment and they are transitioning into creating a proposal to move toward NEPA process. FS is going to come up with an open preliminary project design piece for anyone to participate in. Darcie added that the Gravelly landscape process has been going really well so far; it has been both inviting to the community and collaborative in nature. She gave kudos to the FS for their efforts.
- Red Rocks (Dave Sabo): Public meeting starts in 40 minutes.

11. Review of 2017 Schedule/Activities

- June 15 meeting in Butte-Silverbow Archive, Butte
- July 13 (tentatively, dependent on Pintler Face field trip) *NOTE – This date doesn't work for the FS so currently are looking for a new date.*
- August 2 (begin first Wednesday of the month meeting schedule)
- September 6

12. June Agenda Items - *National Forest Foundation unable to attend this meeting*

- Focus group exercise led by Clint Kolarich: Improving Lives
- Finish Big Hole Divide Landscape vision document

13. Discussion of Regular Meeting Dates

- BDWG regularly scheduled meetings on the 3rd Thursday of each month are now conflicting with FLT meetings. Based on the survey responses, Karen D. proposed moving meetings to the first Wednesday of each month beginning in July or August. The BDWG approved this change which will take effect starting in August.

14. Closing