

**Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group
Meeting Record**

Wednesday, April 4, 2018, 1:00 – 5:00 p.m.
Butte Archives, 17 W. Quartz St., Butte, MT

ATTENDANCE

Members: Tony Colter and Nick Jose, timber representatives; Nick Gevock, wildlife representative; John Kountz and Rick Sandru, agricultural representatives; Karen Laitala, non-motorized recreation representative; Commissioner Mike McGinley, Beaverhead County; Dave Schulz, at-large representative; Mark Thompson, mining and recreation representative; Darcie Warden, conservation representative; Commissioner Leonard Wortman, Jefferson County

Technical Advisors: Erik Nylund, Senator Tester's office; Alex Dunn, Cameron Razor, and Scot Shuler, USDA Forest Service

Visitors: Chris Marchion and Dave Stone, Anaconda Sportsman's Club; Willy Peck, Idaho Forest Group

Facilitators: Ben Irely and Naomi Neal, National Forest Foundation

MEETING OUTCOMES

Decisions:

- March meeting record approved.
- Proposal to send a letter to Senator Daines and Congressman Gianforte requesting public hearings on WSA bills did not pass, with several thumbs down votes.
- Proposal to send a letter to Forest Supervisor Melany Glossa supporting chainsaw exemptions to maintain wilderness trails in the Little Hogback-Meyers project area passed.

Action Items:

- Members should attend the Colorado State University (CSU) focus group on 5/24 on National Forest Foundation (NFF) programs. Hopefully this will be held at the Butte archives.
- Keep possible future funding for Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group (BDWG) in mind.
- Cameron Razor will share the Sapphire Mountains Wilderness Study Area (WSA) report with the group.
- Alex Dunn will gather information on past WSA recommendations (from previous attempts to resolve/delist these areas) and disseminate it to the group for discussion at the next meeting.
- Chris Marchion will draft the letter supporting Cameron's chainsaw exemption request and submit it to the Steering Committee for vetting.
- Rick & Darcie will disseminate the Ruby Valley Collaborative's example letter on the value of public hearings/process.
- May agenda items:
 - Presentation on Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) basics, pros, and cons (Alex Dunn has a contact in mind).
 - Update on chainsaw exemption decision for Little Hogback-Meyers project.

- Timber representatives to talk about Boulder Lowlands GNA and Fleecer.

Bin Items:

- Agenda items for upcoming meetings (from April agenda): Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation on the status of Community Wildfire Protection Plans within the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest (BDNF); state of timber industry economics by Sun Mountain Lumber; an update on the livestock industry and the BDNF; summer field trips.
- Agenda items for upcoming meetings (from 4/4 discussion): What is the USFS's long-term plan for building BDNF capacity?; presentation by a fire ecologist (Cameron has a contact in mind).
- Some members would like to draft a letter to the Montana congressional delegation regarding changes and additions to the farm bill.

MEETING RECORD

Welcome and introductions (Dave Schulz)

All in attendance introduced themselves. March meeting record approved. Addition to today's agenda and future agendas moving forward: review of last month's action items.

Announcements and upcoming events (Dave Schulz)

- Recommended reading, 3/30 *Wall Street Journal* [article](#) on cowboy lifestyles in the American West. Covers rancher land loss, grazing allotments, and technicalities limiting ranchers; presents the problem in a relatively unbiased and straightforward manner.
- Recommendation: 4/3 *Montana Standard* [article](#) on forest users & foresters, and how philosophies have evolved over the past ~20 years.

Review of action items from March minutes (Ben Irely)

- The High Divide workshop (4/18 - 4/19 at UM Western) should be a great networking opportunity; the topic for the workshop is "Drought Resilience - Forests & Fire - Wildlife Connectivity & Conflict Reduction." BDWG member Leonard Wortman will be a panelist. Link to workshop: <http://www.highdivide.org/workshop-april-18-10-2018-in-dillon-mt/>
- Please plan to attend the CSU focus group on 5/24 regarding NFF programs.
- Discussion of funding for restoration for the East Deerlodge project. This is a timing issue, and discussions are ongoing, and it's a matter of figuring out how to replace a culvert on a haul route while hauling is ongoing.
- The community wildfire planning meeting that Headwaters Economics is putting on in Helena is invitation only, but there will be a report on outcomes circulated after the meeting.

Membership expansion (Dave Schulz)

There was a discussion of whether a representative with wildlife/technical expertise is needed (maybe Andy Fisher of the Clark Fork Coalition?)

Congressional policy updates (Erik Nylund)

- The federal omnibus spending bill passed a few weeks ago. The bill renewed Secure Rural Schools (SRS) funding and includes a wildfire funding fix despite opposition in the House; this is good news for the USFS and for all of us. As a part of this bill, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) was reauthorized with an increase of \$25M over last year's funding level; Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) is reauthorized, and SRS is reauthorized for 2 years.
- SRS reauthorization: there will be a lapse for 2016 in payments, but 2017-18 will be paid at a reduced level (SRS funded at 95% of 2015 level, skipping 2016). 2018 payments are authorized at 95% of 2017's level, and there is a built-in drop of 5% every year (though only for the two years currently authorized). It is unclear when payments will be made, but the deadline is typically 45 days after authorization. Senator Tester is still pushing for permanent reauthorization of SRS.
- Wildfire funding fixes:
 - Some camps in Congress support treating fuels and fire funding fixes as a package, but some want to treat them separately.
 - Discussion: is the aim of forestry reform to reduce fires? Different areas have different priorities. Reducing fire severity is always a goal, but to a certain extent you do want some hot, severe fires on occasion.
 - Discussion: does the fire funding fix create a new industry/an incentive for fighting fires? The year before last, 57% of the USFS budget was reallocated to fight wildfire. The fix is needed to give USFS flexibility and to give fire parity with other national disasters. This fix gives forest managers the flexibility to address the unknown based on a ten-year average.
 - Discussion: What can BDWG do to support positive outcomes with SRS and funding efforts in the future? Suggestion: write a letter on what should be included in the farm bill.

Report out from Wilderness Study Area (WSA) subcommittee and further discussion

(Tony/Chris)

- Senator Daines' press release on his WSA bill: <https://www.daines.senate.gov/news/press-releases/support-for-daines-protect-public-use-of-public-lands-act-continues>
- The purpose of the WSA Subcommittee is to come up with an alternative to what was proposed and voted down in March (a letter from BDWG to Daines requesting community public hearings on his WSA bill, S-393).
 - What were members' reasons for voting against the proposed letter in March? Reasons discussed: hearings would delay the ultimate decision; just writing to Daines can't get us the three-part support needed from all three members of MT's congressional delegation in order to make WSA delisting a success; hearings would result in doubling the process (public input will be needed on designation if bill passes).
 - WSA Subcommittee did not come to a resolution on a viable letter option between the March and April meetings.

- Representative Gianforte is sponsoring a similar bill in the House which goes a bit further by including WSAs on BLM lands.
- Discussion of past WSA delisting and designation recommendations and whether old study data and findings, and public input can still be applied (rather than redone).
 - Information gathered at public hearings years ago likely no longer applicable.
- Many members frustrated that Congress has been unable to solve this problem over the preceding decades. Suggestion: BDWG should send a letter suggesting final resolution according to USFS recommendations. Daines' bill is controversial because it doesn't require the adoption of these or other specific recommendations.
- Suggestions: BDWG should send a letter requesting public hearings and the MT delegation's support of the process to resolve this. We should consider making specific designation recommendations about what we'd like to see happen to the BDNF's two WSAs. Some skepticism that whole group could come to an agreement on BDNF WSA resolution. Widespread interest among membership in reviewing existing studies on BDNF WSAs. It's a good idea for BDWG to weigh in because we are more familiar with BDNF than Congress.
- Counterpoint: BDWG should just request hearings and not take a group position on Daines' and/or Gianforte's bills, or on WSAs. Partisan/political issues make attempts to find consensus on land designation difficult and potentially threatening to group well-being.
- Discussion of BDWG's appropriate scope of interest, and whether it is appropriate for the collaborative to weigh in on statewide efforts and/or make requests on the behalf of the public.
- Options under consideration:
 - Letter to Daines/Daines & Gianforte/full Montana congressional delegation:
 - In support of local public hearings on WSA bill(s);
 - To propose a process for resolution of land designations;
 - To recommend specific resolutions for BDNF's WSAs;
 - To request support for WSA release; or
 - To request that past studies and recommendations on Montana's WSAs be reviewed as a part of this effort
- Discussion: finding common ground and a shared message among diverse constituency groups is difficult. It will likely be easier to gain widespread support for a process, than for specific recommendations.
- **Motion:** BDWG could send Daines & Gianforte a letter requesting that they hold public hearings on both pieces of legislation, with an offer of facilitation and scheduling support. We might further request that these hearings revolve around historical recommendations from previous studies of WSAs.
- Discussion: what is the intended outcome of public hearings? It may be too late to change what's in the bill.
- **Vote** on motion to send letter to Senator Daines and Representative Gianforte requesting public hearings:
 - 3 thumbs up, 5 thumbs down, 1 sideways thumb
- Proposal: we should review past WSA studies and recommendations at the next meeting.

BDNF Project Updates (Cameron/Alex)

- Prison Ranch Foothills project a.k.a. “Rancho Deluxe”: This GNA project is moving forward as a partnership between USFS and neighbors. The state-proposed area for the project is roughly 12 miles NW of Deer Lodge. The project aims to clean up dead and treat dying lodgepole pine affected by beetle damage on both USFS and state-owned lands, as well as promote resiliency via some strategic seeding efforts. About 1200 acres of timber on the forest lands is harvestable, potentially providing ~15M board-feet. The project is slated to be kicked off on 4/6/18. Public meetings and field trips will be held in and/or leave from Deer Lodge. The project is being approved through a Categorical Exclusion (CE) process, and USFS hopes to get it done within 9-12 months. This project has a lot of potential for testing out the relatively little-applied GNA framework, and will hopefully show what is it bringing to the table and reveal any unforeseen challenges.
- Little Hogback-Meyers Fire Salvage project: These areas burned in BDNF’s northern region in 2017, and the Forest region is taking a programmatic approach to fire salvage. The timber projects are designed to meet industry demand without over-saturating the market. The two areas were selected from among a variety of proposals, and are easily combined because they are consistent in terms of issues; neither project area includes any special-designated areas, roadless areas, recently-harvested areas, or areas of 35% or greater slope. These projects aim to reduce hazards, assist in recovery and regeneration, and recover economic value for local economies. The Little Hogback project area is approximately 1200 acres, and will require ~3.5 miles of temporary roads. In the Meyers area, over 300 acres have been identified for harvest. Public meetings and field trips for both areas are to be scheduled this summer, and 10M-15M board-feet are expected from the areas. The project is being planned via an Environmental Assessment (EA) process, and public comment and scoping are set to begin in mid-May; hopefully a decision will be out by late October, and the sale made by end of January 2019.
- Discussion: Why is scoping delayed later than other salvage projects in the state? BDNF did not apply for an emergency status declaration for Little Hogback-Meyers, unlike other fire salvage projects. The forest may not have enough capacity for the Emergency Status Declaration (ESD) process; the project is mostly being done by a team of non-BDNF employees from elsewhere in the USFS system, so even without ESD, there is no capacity for this salvage team.
- Discussion: What are the plans for Meyers Creek-adjacent trails? Will they be open this summer? Without chainsaw exemption, looks like it could be years to clear trails. Cameron made a request to the forest regional supervisors for a chainsaw exemption (district rangers can authorize exemptions in wilderness but only when there is an emergency). Discussion of trails’ popularity with the public; threat of upcoming fire seasons; aging of timber and loss of value.
 - **Motion:** to send a letter to the Forest Supervisor, Regional Supervisor, and Senator Tester in support of the requested chainsaw exemption in order to reopen these fire-damaged trails. Revision to motion: it’s better to send the letter to just the Forest Supervisor first - don’t go over her head. Discussion of whether to CC: the MT congressional delegation. Decision: no.

■ **Vote:** revised motion passes unanimously. Letter to be sent to Melany Glossa.

- Boulder Lowlands project: the USFS sale has been completed and closed down. ~400 acres were not contracted in this initial sale; USFS now working with the DNRC to sell this through the GNA. This is another testing ground for GNA.
- Red Rocks project: 17 comment letters were received during the comment period, and suggested changes are being incorporated into the next version of the proposal. A meeting in mid-April will finalize the next iteration of the project proposal. A draft of the first two sections of the EA is expected by the end of April, with specialist reports due in mid-May, a review in early June, an objection period beginning in July, and a decision scheduled for December.
- Pintler Face project: the next version of the EA is being finalized, and this project is at a similar stage as the Red Rocks project. The EA will be out for objections in June, and a decision is expected in Q1 2019.
- Fleecer project: The court has received an opposition brief from plaintiffs' in response to the motion to lift the injunction on the project. A response to the brief is due on April 11, then then it's up to judge whether to lift injunction.
- Greenhorn project: The project EA is being put together now; it will be put out for objection in May. There have been some personnel changes on the strike team overseeing projects; USFS is trying to backfill as fast as possible but this may affect the timeline for Greenhorn.
- Discussion: How will the federal budget's fire funding fix affect the BDNF?
 - This is unclear. Typically any money not allocated by start of fire season is up for grabs when fires start, so this situation may be alleviated. The agency's strategy moving forward is to allocate & obligate the majority of funds by June 1st. Just because more money will be available for fire doesn't mean we'll have more capacity to do other projects if labor hours are directed toward fire at the expense of other needs. Is there any potential for increasing capacity/proactive treatments? Suggestion to write a letter to the regional forester regarding plans for BDNF capacity building.

USFS Environmental Analysis and Decision Making change effort (Dave/Ben)

- This change effort is directed toward increasing capacity, efficiency, and effectiveness. The goal is to decrease cost and increase efficiency of USFS EADM by 20% by 2019. Partner roundtable meetings held in each forest region provide feedback from public partners who work with the USFS (like BDWG members). Partners were asked to identify barriers and objectives, as well as collaboration-specific needs. 60-70 people attended the Missoula roundtable; it was a diverse group and successfully reached consensus on concerns and suggestions for increased efficiency. Reports on these roundtables will be up on the NFF website in the next month, and will help inform the rule-making process.

Meeting Wrap-Up

- Report from Joint Montana Forest Collaborative Network / Idaho Forest Restoration Partners Workshop in Couer d'Alene, March 21-22: this was a networking opportunity &

co-learning opportunity including a discussion of federal budget implications. The plan is to hold an annual regional collaboratives workshop.

- Upcoming BDWG meetings: May 2, May 24 focus group.
- Some discussion of WSA conversation re: consensus rules, requirements for offering a constructive alternative. Suggestion for alternative to proposed letter in support of public WSA hearings: letter to Daines outlining the benefits of an open public process without making a specific demand/request or taking a stance on the legislation. There is an existing letter which could be used for this purpose created by the Ruby Valley Strategic Alliance. Could we model our tone after this example? Rick and Darcie will disseminate to the BDWG.
- Dave Schulz announced his departure from Montana and from the BDWG.

Meeting adjourned: 5:00 PM.

DRAFT