

**Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group**  
**Boulder Lowlands Field Trip Notes**  
Butte Ranger District, 1820 Meadowlark  
Butte, MT 59701  
8/1/2018, 11am

**ATTENDANCE**

**Members:** Tony Colter, timber representative; Nick Jose, timber representative; John Kountz, agricultural representative; Jefferson County Commissioner Leonard Wortman; Chris Marchion, citizen-at-large representative; Willy Peck, timber representative

**Technical Advisors:** Dave Sabo, District Ranger USFS; Anton Brennick, Silviculturalist, USFS; Lucus Phillips, Range Management Specialist, USFS; Jeanne Dawson, Timber, Range, and Ecology Staff Officer, USFS; Kevin Smith, Zone FMO, USFS

**Visitors:** Bryan Lorengo, Jeffery Tolmek, Neil Simpson, DNRC/GNA; Kerry Morse, Adam Liljeblad, and Hannah Leonard, National Forest Foundation

**Facilitator:** Ben Irely, National Forest Foundation

**BRIEF MEETING AND FIELD TRIP OUTCOMES** – [1/2 hour meeting before field trip @ Butte Ranger District]

**Decisions**

- 7/11 meeting minutes approved

**Action Items**

- Ben to reach out to Dave for list/comments on the success of BDWG

**Bin Items**

- Possibly discuss BDWG's position on fence/road maintenance

**MEETING RECORD** – [1/2 hour meeting before field trip @ Butte Ranger District]

**1. Review of Previous Meeting action items/bin Items** - Ben

Reviewed approvals from last meeting. Added Ted to mailing list. FWP biologist was not able to attend today's field trip. Ben will reach out to BDNF District Rangers to ready them to present forest priorities for the October BDWG meeting.

Update on the WSA's - Alex has one hard copy with one fold out map at the Regional Office. They're digitizing it now. Alex will share as much info as he has ahead of the September meeting.

**2. Announcements** - Members of the group

- FS prevailed on Telegraph Creek in Helena. Sun Mountain bought the sale.
  - RMEF was in support of the project due to the benefit to elk
  - There are seasonal restriction in this area due to hunting and wildlife
  - This sale is located before McDonald Pass and the Spotted Dog area.
- WSA Meeting in Helena (review of Daine's bill)
  - 200 people showed up.
  - This was a county sponsored meeting to determine if they should send a letter in support of Daines and Gianforte's bill about WSAs.
  - County is taking comments through the end of the week. There will be a round table on August 15<sup>th</sup>.
  - People are really interested in WSAs and public lands.
- Jefferson River Watershed County is hosting its 16th Annual Fundraiser
  - Whitehall August 16th, Boulder August 17<sup>th</sup>
  - Beer and eats, everyone welcome.
- Next meeting will be September 5th at the Butte Archives from 1-5ish
  - Big topics for next meeting: What happens with release of WSAs? Does BDWG want to get involved?

### 3. BOULDER LOWLANDS FIELD TRIP - Dave Sabo

Lowlands Drainage

#### Objectives:

- 1) Give a background of the project area(s)
- 2) Why here, why now?
- 3) Good Neighbor Authority
- 4) Review of Red Rocks

#### Konda Trailhead - Site 1

- Issue here was the need to protect the scenic trail due to proximity to continental divide.
- Purpose: salvage dead lodgepole pine while it still has economic value.
- Harvested this area December- March of 2016. Whole tree skidded, piled with log loader rather than dozer to create larger and fewer piles.
- The contract stated whole tree length, not part. Also 5-12 tons/acre slash left on site for unit nutrients as part of NEPA analysis and wildlife issue
  - Contract does not account for hand crews returning to disperse slash, can't disperse beyond designated skid trails.
  - Use slash for erosion protection on skid trails instead of water bars. Logged in winter to protect soils.
    - Bryan Lorenzo mentioned if you have winter logging, skidders should be allowed to skid disperse. Wants a place to voice concerns with timber sale contracts/details.
- Deep snow in early fall can lead to the ground not being frozen, therefore leaving soil vulnerable in winter logging as well.
- Charcoal pads from the Butte mining heyday are preserved in the project area for cultural significance.

- Working with the GNA for the rest of the Boulder Lowlands project (~ 400 more acres to be treated the same way).
- No more immediate plans for this area as Red Rocks is the next priority.
- You can see where the logging stopped, this was because of the slope.
- Concern expressed for the fencing system, which is falling apart and therefore not able to properly manage cattle and significant danger in sending someone in to fix the fencing due to snag danger. This is a forest-wide issue.
- The FS is looking to this group to help them decide where to go next. Which areas are priorities?
- This particular project it was decided that you could not cut any more than 15 inches stump diameter trees, not diameter at breast height (DBH).
  - This was decided in the planning stage according to the wildlife stand standard – problematic when cutting in winter due to depth of snow.

### **Sheep's Head Mountain Overlook - Site 2**

- The work in this project area is almost done.
  - The timber sale will close in the coming weeks.
  - The public will be invited to take firewood from slash piles prior to burning them.
  - Total project area approved in NEPA with CE is 1,800 acres. The FS has treated about 800-900 acres of this. The GNA will treat an additional 400 acres. Totaling 1,300 acres.

### **Background:**

- Mid-2000's mountain pine beetle came in and the stand conditions (all same age and size), drought, lack of moisture and other climate contributors lead to perfect conditions for the beetles to take over.
- 2010 BDNF was going through Forest Plan revision
  - A rapid assessment was done due to the pine beetle issue. Aerial photos, identified key areas affected by insect epidemic, prioritized areas.
  - The Boulder Lowlands river drainage was most critical
  - Ideally to salvage the lodgepole while needles were still red
  - Regional office gave funding for an enterprise team to put together a sale of 142,000 acres
  - Prioritization went away which stopped the EIS
- 2013 - what can we do to salvage the 2010 opportunity?
  - The FS was worried about something happening (a fire) in Boulder
  - Looked at little areas to treat at a time
  - Make smaller project to get through NEPA
- 2014 Farm Bill
  - Met criteria for it
  - Needed a group to identify priority watersheds (already had a group from the 2010 process)
  - Approved over 5 million acres in MT
- Farm Bill CE
  - Able to get done in 6 months

- Only looked at timber harvest
- Group wanted to look at range, roads, fisheries
  - Looked at reduction of sediment to water systems
  - No new roads, no temp roads
    - FS kept this way to avoid controversy and get the CE approved
    - Wildlife coverage
- This area is in 2nd generation timber. It was originally clear cut during the Butte Mine heyday
- No prescribed burns have been done on this area due to small trees coming up giving the stand diverse age (hopefully to avoid another beetle epidemic) and also to avoid having to plant trees
- Is it possible to control burn some areas while logged areas are regenerating?
  - Worried about making elk more vulnerable
  - There are ways to mitigate elk vulnerabilities. The best way to protect elk is road closures, but as soon as closures are mentioned, people start to advocate for keeping it open.
- Road and trail density in Boulder is over the limit as stated in the Forest Plan and have not been addressed in full travel standard
- The project with the GNA is under the same CE and NEPA as Boulder Lowlands
  - Use money from this project as a financial safeguard
- Group member mentioned not allowing access if the FS can't maintain the roads
- FS mentioned there is a backlog of cattle guard clean outs. None will be happening this year because of the restoration projects in Phillipsburg. Potentially the FS will contract with ranchers to do the clean outs if they have the proper equipment.
- Member asked if there is a plan for travel planning.
  - Districts 1,2,3 moving forward, then Butte, then Pintler for Travel Analysis Plan (TAP)
- Pre-2000's, roads that are user made were legal at the time
  - FS needs to clean up data to exclude roads that aren't used and over grown so not included in total road miles in a forest plan
- Contentious deal when removing roads from recreation
- Group member discussed issue with conifer encroachment causing water to dry up, driving elk into ranches and towns. People don't understand the relationship between trees and water. Before encroachment, there was a creek, now all that water is sucked up into the trees. The FS needs to remember its initial mandate was to protect the watershed and without forest management of this conifer encroachment it isn't doing this.
- Summary of the background of this area/project: Beetles → rapid assessment → enterprise team → NEPA process
- Prioritized areas 1-9 based on beetles and mortality
  - Entire area is 8-10 inch lodgepole, beetles come in 60-100 year cycles and destroy forests as a function of same sized trees, and climatic conditions.
  - Problem → assessment team wasn't from the area, but was still successful
  - Too big of a bite - 142,000 acres
  - Shrunk project to 10k acres, NEPA process was completed in 6 months

- Skidding vs. Temp roads:
  - Temp roads can be “put to bed”
  - Sportsman like temp roads (foot access not motorized vehicle access)
  - Skidding downhill can only erosion control and seed
  - Would prefer using temp roads to skidding downhill
  - Possibly retire temp roads to non-motorized use trails?
- Sales coming up...
  - Wisdom/Wide River prep is underway → looking to advertise soon
  - Boulder Lowlands GNA → working with the state
  - 181 U-Turn sale
- FS is paying attention to “if we can’t harvest here, then where?”
- Fleecer Sale holdup:
  - Grizzly, lynx, roads
  - USFW matrix wasn’t in correct format
  - If judge approves, lifts injunction, then sale goes out to bid (likely fall)
- Member brought up the need for some FS focus on fence line for grazing permits
  - Due to fallen timber
  - Permittees then become out of compliance over something they can’t control
  - As a ranger, can’t/doesn’t have flexibility to deal with fallen trees on fences
  - Many fencing is not online (private land)
  - Is this something the working group should be doing?
  - No just something to be aware of

### Roadside View Point of Various Projects - Site 3

- GNA - Neil Simpson with DNRC
- Why is the state doing this?
  - 1) health of the forest is in decline
  - 2) it is a fire hazard
  - 3) retaining the timber industry
- This began with Bullock’s [Forest in Focus Initiative](#)
- Emphasis in DNRC to work with GNA
- All mandatory units are flagged and painted, optional are still in discussion
  - Timber subject to agreement - additional timber that can be harvested depending on buyers ability and economic benefit
- GNA works in partnership with the state and FS
  - Silviculture prescription and NEPA decision making responsibilities remain with the FS
- Program income → another pot for the FS. Any value above bid rate goes into fund for further forest restoration
  - Funds gained from GNA work can fund 3 other National Forests:
    - Custer Gallatin, Helena Lewis & Clark, Beaverhead Deer Lodge
- GNA sale this fall, lots of winter logging - sale admin in with NEPA
- As soon as the state’s GNA program has more money, they will hire another forester
  - Going after conservation groups for money as well

- Wants forester for Kootenai, Flathead, Missoula, then east side
- Other notes on forest:
  - 70-75% stand mortality, average 6" diameter
  - 10-20% loss of standing, especially on ridge top
  - Many units are post and rail
  - Bigger skidder = less damage
    - Can take more loads = less trips = less erosion issues
    - No chains makes for lost traction
- There are not such things as 12 ft wide skid trails, most are 20ft

### **Red Rocks Discussion**

- 79k acres, 4-5k acres salvage harvest
- Encompasses everything in Boulder River area
- Road system analysis, which to use, which to retire?
  - Utilize roads that were used in the past
    - Temp roads, new or existing. Many temp roads are on old systems maps
    - There's not enough data on system roads
  - NEPA process wants to put back to what it was (wildlife and aesthetic)
  - Discuss finding opportunity in temp logging roads (turn into non-motorized)
- Specialist scoping is completed
- End of August comments completed
- DEIS
- Middle of September - objection period (45 days)
  - 30 days to review objections
    - Specialists review comments and objections
- Regional forester recommendation released
- Incorporate into EA and if FONSI, project begins

**Meeting adjourned at 4:00 PM**