

**Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group  
Meeting Record**

3:00 – 5:00 PM, Wednesday, June 3, 2020

Adobe Connect

**ATTENDANCE**

**Members:** Tony Colter, timber representative; Maureen Connor, citizen-at-large; Commissioner Leonard Wortman, Jefferson County; Nick Jose, timber representative; Karen Laitala, quiet recreation and weeds representative; Commissioner Tom Rice, Beaverhead County; Rick Sandru, agriculture representative; Chris Marchion, hunting Representative; Willy Peck, timber representative; Darcie Warden, conservation representative; Tom Harrington, motorized recreation representative

**Technical advisors:** Cheri Ford, Jeanne Dawson, and Chip Fisher, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest; Steve Kimball, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

**Facilitators:** Ben Irely and Shauni Seccombe, National Forest Foundation

**MEETING OUTCOMES**

**Action Items**

- Chip Fisher will share KMZ files for Google Earth so members can take a look at the Whitetail and South Tobacco Roots planning areas to generate local knowledge and area values.
- Chip Fisher will follow up on the question, "When the Out-Year Planning Evaluation states that projects are four years out, what exactly does that mean, four years from NEPA starting or four years to implementation?"
- Cheri Ford will share the link for public comment about the East Pioneers Project with Ben so that he can forward that to the group.
- Ben Irely will help initiate and organize a meeting for the Partnership Subcommittee.
- Any members that have project photos for the Montana Forest Collaboration Network Annual Report should forward them to Ben or Tony. Any members with content suggestions, or specific items to highlight for the report, should send their ideas to Ben ASAP.
- Ben Irely shared summarized meeting notes for April and May, he will follow up with meeting records as soon as he can.

**Bin Items**

- The Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest (BDNF) asks that the Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group (BDWG) assist with communications re: recent vandalism at recreation sites.
- BDWG to provide BDNF with feedback on out-year projects.
- There may be a 30-day comment period around August or September for the Outfitter and Guide Environmental Assessment (EA).

**MEETING RECORD**

## 1. Welcome, Trouble-Shooting Adobe Connect and Introductions

Adobe Connect was discussed in regards to meeting suitability. Advice was given to troubleshoot technical issues. Each participant gave a brief introduction.

## 2. Chip Fisher's Presentation "Beaverhead-Deerlodge Out-Year Planning Area Evaluation, Version 3"

[see presentation]

## 3. Out-Year Planning Discussion

- Can we fit this into existing work that the Forest Service is doing? Will this be integrated with current Forest Service planning tools?
  - About a year ago the Regional Forester directed us to move forward with this out-year planning process across all forests. So, the Forest Service will be implementing this tool with the intent of providing consistency and to help drive this kind of work forward.
- Will these planning areas replace the projects that are in the works? Or will they be in addition to? And what priorities bring projects to the top (past projects seem driven by timber harvest, since there have been significant opportunities due to being behind on timber treatments)?
  - Current projects are still going to continue forward and on the same timelines. These two project areas are planned for 2024 - 2030 (unless modifications occur due to further analysis). The primary focuses are fire risk reduction (fuels, burning, etc.) and timber production. Due to the dramatic changes we've seen on our forests across the Region that affect fire and wildlife, we need to do some aggressive fuels and timber treatments. When you look at a 30,000 foot level, we might do more than one project in a certain area if it makes sense.
- Will the Montana Climate Assessment be considered in this evaluation? In areas where there is conifer encroachment, the challenges become compounded by climate change and drought, specifically in regards to impacts on water. Some of these areas aren't showing up on your map - how can we get your attention and resources to these areas?
  - We discussed the topic of climate change at the Regional Office and it was decided that it would be considered as a secondary driver within the evaluation process. We didn't specifically use the Montana Climate Assessment but these elements were considered in relation to ideas presented within the restoration plan. The current plan will be reviewed annually and things may adapt in response to changing circumstances.
- It's nice to see the region taking this approach, although I am a bit concerned about the one size fits all approach. But, if it is used as a template or course framework that includes on the ground information, then it could be a useful tool. In this map, some areas were eliminated from what appeared in the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) restoration strategy. It would be interesting to see why those areas were not included. What influence did fish key watersheds have?
  - Fish key watersheds were not one of the main indicators involved in the Focus Area Indicators (FAI), and so we didn't really include that. Fish restoration goals by watershed are present within other plans.

- How can the BDWG plug into this? How can we help carry this forward?
  - If the group has information, issues, or special concerns in relation to the first two planning areas, Whitetail and South Tobacco Roots, please let us know. Chip Fisher will share KMZ files for Google Earth so members can take a look at those two areas to generate local knowledge and area values.
- Is it possible to include a risk assessment portion that considers indirect risks? For example, the Gravellys are used by 10,000 head of cattle and sheep. There is a significant conifer encroachment issue, which is resulting in a severe fire risk and therefore, a tremendous economic risk. This encroachment issue is also affecting water quantity.
  - That's something we could look at moving forward. It's really helpful for the group to articulate these concerns.
- It would be interesting to look at this map with the Farm Bill recommendations that we came up with, and the CFLRP recommendations, and then talk about why some of them didn't make it.
- When the Out-Year Planning Evaluation states that projects would be four years out, what exactly does that mean? Four years out from being implemented or four years from NEPA starting?
  - That's a good question. I will have to find the answer to that and follow up. Our thoughts about initiating this process now is to get the ball rolling on a few projects, in a way creating on-the-shelf projects, so that when it is time, they are ready to go. Also, a forester was hired in Butte, so we are hoping to have more capacity to move forward on projects and continue to work collaboratively with the DNRC and BLM.

#### 4. Updates from BDNF

- **Resource Advisory Council (RAC)** had their first of two meetings for the Tri Counties: Deerlodge, Powell, and Granite. The second meeting will be held tomorrow. Maureen Connor was there as Chair and Karen Laitala participated on the committee. The RAC looked at proposals to recommend and discussed the recreation fee proposals.
- **Recreation** - There's been a lot of people recreating. The recreation staff are excited to get facilities prepared. They also have to get the message out that some sites are open while others are not ready yet. We have a cleaning plan in place to protect employees cleaning rec facilities. There's been a lot of vandalism. We would like to include the vandalism issue as an item in communication strategies to demonstrate that there is an opportunity for partners to help with this.
- **Range and Weeds** - We're looking at conditions on allotments and range readiness. There is a lot of ground ready to seed out and we're working to ensure that conditions are successful. Weeds agreements are in place for treatments this year.

#### 5. BDNF Communications, Partnership, and Capacity Subcommittee Updates

- **General updates** - There was a COVID press release. The public is now being asked to get a permit for firewood. Office doors are not officially open yet. We are working on ways to interface with the public. On June 8th, the office will begin phasing into 75% of staff in the office. There is a large hiring effort for firefighters. Currently, the BDNF has hired 19

firefighters with a total goal of 22. It is expected that there will be an above normal fire activity for the month of July. There is frequent coordination with the DNRC and BLM to determine how to operate together to work in the fire arena this year. The forest has already met its timber and fuels target for this year. We are asking for feedback about out-year projects – ideas, comments, questions. Need to identify projects to hand off to various Forest Service groups (interdisciplinary teams and NEPA).

- **Project Updates:**

- Red Rocks has not been litigated yet. We have produced sound NEPA documents and so are going full steam ahead.
- Tomorrow is the hearing session with the Appeals Court for the Dry Cottonwood Project.
- Pintler Face (EA), Greenhorn (EA) and Rancho Deluxe (CE) are all in the queue, with the hope that they may be able to move forward in the fall. Currently, there are pre-bids out with the hope that it will be unnecessary to wait until spring to put them up for sale. Will try and give the Working Group a good heads up so that there will be an appropriate amount of time for the Group to craft a response letter.
- East Pioneers Project draft is currently out for comment. Comments due June 29<sup>th</sup>. Will share the link with Ben to share with everybody.
- The Efficient Public Collaboration effort seems to have been dropped.

- **Outfitter and Guide EA** - Has not been signed yet. There have been a lot of scoping comments, and so proposed actions are being augmented. We are currently waiting for wildlife and recreation reports. We need to have follow-up conversations with FWP about mountain lion outfitting. There may be a 30-day comment period around August or September.

## **5. BDWG Communications Subcommittee Update**

- We are developing content for the Facebook page. We will link to the Mark Finney fire presentation and to the Forest Service Communications Plan. We will connect with Nick Smith from Healthy Forest, Healthy Communities for feedback on communication strategies. We would like to link the Working Group page with the BDNF page.
- We would like to create a communication calendar to plot out when we want to get certain products out to the media. [This notion was seconded by other members that felt like a calendar could really help with scoping and identifying when we might get involved in projects].

## **6. Partnership Subcommittee Update**

There are several to-do items to work on and so will need to schedule another meeting. Ben made a note to help get calls organized.

## **7. Montana Forest Action Advisory Council Update**

- We need to submit our annual collaborative report to the Montana Forest Collaboration Network by the end of the month. Any members that have project photos should forward them to Ben or Tony. Any members with content suggestions, or specific items to highlight, should send their ideas to Ben ASAP.
- An update on the Good Neighbor Authority is available in the quarterly report.

- The Montana Forest Action Advisory Committee is hoping to have a draft release for the State Forest Action Plan in August. There are still areas where agreement needs to be made. They need to try and develop measurement tools in regards to progress and accomplishments. They are meeting monthly.

#### **8. Member Close-Out Questions and Comments**

- When can we get back together for meetings? Is there a possibility for field trips?
- The Steering Committee will need to explore those possibilities.

The next meeting date of Wednesday, July 1st received several votes of approval. Ben shared two documents with the group 1) shortened summaries of the April and May meetings and 2) an informative paper on State and Private Forestry (S&PF).

**Meeting adjourned at 4:58pm**

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