

Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group (BDWG) Meeting Record

1:00 to 5:00 p.m., Wednesday, February 5, 2020
Anaconda Job Corps Civilian Conservation Center

<https://www.nationalforests.org/collaboration-resources/beaverhead-deerlodge-working-group>

MEETING SUMMARY

Attendance

Members: Commissioner Dan Allhands, Madison County; Tony Colter, timber representative; Maureen Connor, citizen-at-large representative; Chris Edgington, fishing representative; Nick Gevock, wildlife representative; Tom Harrington, motorized recreation representative; Karen Laitala, quiet recreation and weeds representative; Chris Marchion, conservation representative; Willy Peck, timber representative; and Commissioner Tom Rice, Beaverhead County

Technical advisors: Steve Kimball, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC); and Anton Brennick, Cheri Ford, and Jessica Schick, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest (BDNF)

Guests and observers: Dan Sager, Powell County and Mark Sweeney, Representative House District 77

Facilitator: Ben Irely, National Forest Foundation (NFF)

Decisions

- December meeting record approved.

Action items

- BDWG discusses their potential role as a clearinghouse or umbrella organization for all the partnerships on the BDNF.
- Ben Irely to send Chelsea Pennick's contact info out to the BDWG.
- Ben Irely to include Jeanne Dawson in invitations for the Capacity Subcommittee.
- BDWG gives feedback on the Upper Little Whitetail and South Tobacco Roots projects.
- Ben Irely to call all the rangers and set dates for public meetings to roll out the Integrated Restoration Strategy (IRS) mapping exercise. These meetings will occur sometime before May. Ben will arrange for BDWG members to attend or support these meetings.
- This year is the five-year General Management Review of the BDNF. The BDNF may be reaching out to BDWG members regarding an associated in-person meeting. If the BDWG has ideas for how this meeting should be conducted, contact Jessica Schick or Cheri Ford.
- BDWG comments on the BLM Dillon Field Office and BDNF East Pioneers Environmental Analysis when it is released in June.
- Ben Irely to put "Update from the Grizzly Council" on the March meeting agenda.
- Ben Irely to put "Montana Forest Action Advisory Council update" on the March meeting agenda for 30 minutes.
- BDWG to comment on Selway Sagana when scoping starts in March.

- BDWG to comment on the Strawberry to Cascade Grazing Allotment Management Plan when it is when it is out for comment.
- Ben Irely to call Mark Finney to relay that it would be great if his presentation to BDWG at the April meeting would be similarly themed to the presentation he gave to the Montana Forest Action Advisory Council.
- Ben Irely to contact Anton Brennick in a month to see when would be best to schedule a deeper-dive into the restoration strategy with BDWG and Chip Fisher.

Bin items from this and previous meetings

- When the BDNF has a draft of their 6-10 year plan together (estimated for May), present to the BDWG for feedback.
- Have a presentation from Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation about the Miller Lake Valley Acquisition.
- Next fall, members and stakeholders should think about applying for Pittman-Robertson funding for invasive species management. It is a complex grant application, so start early!
- BDWG to take a field trip to Selway-Sagana in the spring.
- Jeanne Dawson is looking to members to get out in the field and take the National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) survey when it is being conducted and to give her feedback from the participant's perspective.
- Have a BDNF range person present on the subject of timber encroachment.
- Apply to the Joint Chief's Landscape Restoration Partnership in the fall of 2020.
- At the Montana Forest Collaboration Network and Montana Watershed Council joint meeting, Oct 14 and 16 of 2020, Mark Finney will present fire modeling in relation to the municipal watersheds and WUI.
- Have a presentation on Chronic Wasting Disease at an upcoming meeting.
- BDWG and Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest (BDNF) to look at user created recreation features (e.g. user created campsites) and consider incorporating some features into the system.
- Maureen Connor suggests finding someone who can speak to group re: spruce budworm.
- Schedule a presentation by Cathy Whitlock from MSU to talk about predicted impacts of climate change on the BDNF.

MEETING RECORD

Welcome, introductions, approve agenda and December meeting record

[Co-chair provides welcome, attendees introduce themselves, and December meeting record approved.]

Report out from the Communications, Partnerships, and Capacity Subcommittees

Capacity Subcommittee

The Subcommittee took some of the more communications-related action items off of their action plan. The focus of this subcommittee will be on grants and advocating for resources on the BDNF.

On a call earlier this week the Subcommittee talked about options for writing grants on behalf of BDWG, including hiring a grant writer or possibly having NFF's development team work on grant applications on BDWG's behalf.

Partnership Subcommittee

- On a call earlier this week, the Subcommittee wrestled with question of whether or not to have the BDWG be a clearinghouse or umbrella organization for all the partnerships on the forest.
- The idea for this subcommittee is to get the restoration strategy complete and then take it around to all of the groups to share the information.
- This subcommittee should maintain open lines of communications between other partner organizations and the BDWG.
- The Subcommittee's action plan also talks about engaging adjacent landowners in BDNF projects. Commissioner Wortman has gotten the ball rolling as far as engaging adjacent landowners in the Red Rocks Project. It would be good for the Subcommittee to start by talking to Leonard.
- Several landowners and stakeholders have been engaged in field trips.

Communications Subcommittee

- Certain parts of the Communications Subcommittee action plan do not require waiting for the restoration strategy to get going on, specifically getting fire back on the landscape. The volley of opinions is already going on. This subcommittee needs to enter the fray.
 - With what is going on in Australia right now, there is a lot of information coming down from DC. Perhaps the BDWG can start sharing posts off of Facebook and other social media about fire on the landscape.
- Mark Finney presented to the Montana Forest Action Advisory Council. The BDWG needs to get that same message out to landowners and other stakeholders.

Are collaborative groups making a difference? (Chelsea Pennick – see Collaboration in the Intermountain West PDF)

- This research tries to tackle the questions surrounding the impact of collaboration on the pace and scale of restoration on public lands in Idaho.
- Chelsea is part of the Policy Analysis Group at the University of Idaho. The Group is funded by the legislature. They do policy education, research synthesis, and primary research regarding natural resource related issues.
- One objective of this research was to use readily-available data from the agency so the research can be replicated in other areas.
 - The Forest Service is two years away from a big data reform. At that point, it should be much easier to pull a bunch of different data together into one report.
- Just through interactions with collaborative groups, it is pretty easy to see the benefits of collaboration as far as trust building, relationship building, and expanding the zone of agreement.
- This research looked at 10 collaborative groups on seven National Forests in Idaho over a 14 year period.

- When talking about pace, this research looked at the pace of Categorical Exclusions (CE), Environmental Analyses (EA), and Environmental Impact Statements (EIS). Both collaboratively-produced CEs and traditionally-produced CEs have gotten faster since 2004 but collaboratively-produced CEs have seen a steeper drop in the amount of days to produce than traditionally-produced CEs.
- Traditionally-produced EAs take longer now than they did in 2004, while collaboratively-produced EAs take about as long as they did in 2004. Interestingly, in 2004 collaboratively produced EAs took longer than traditionally produced EAs.
- Likewise, in 2004, collaboratively-produced EISs took longer than traditionally-produced EISs, but over time traditionally-produced EISs have gotten slower while collaboratively-produced EISs have gotten faster.
 - When starting to collaborate with the Payette Forest Coalition, the Payette National Forest did not constrain itself with the time it took to get a collaboratively-produced project done. They were more interested in getting the collaboration right. Then, at some point, the decision was made that collaboration should not slow down a project.
- As far as scale goes, collaboratively-produced projects seem to be larger and more complex than traditionally-produced projects. Therefore, collaboratively-produced projects are more efficient at getting acres treated.
- There seems to be a higher probability of a project getting litigated if it is collaboratively produced.
- There are also quite a few less collaboratively-produced projects.
 - At the national level, the Forest Service is winning about 90% of the cases brought against it.
 - More and more judges are citing collaborative groups in the decisions.
- The future direction of collaboration on projects should be towards collaboratives helping to inform the Forest Service in their tradeoffs between the costs and benefits of a particular project. Also, Line Officers are being encouraged to take greater risks in their project planning. This should lead to more innovation in the project planning. Collaboratives can help drive this innovation.
- The Policy Analysis Group is also looking at the impacts of turnover and capacity within the agency and its effects on pace and scale.

DNRC's and other collaboratives approach to objections and litigation (Steve Kimball – see handouts)

- In his position, Steve supports county and collaborative engagement in federal land management and advises counties on how to help guide local projects. Steve helps counties understand projects being put out by the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. To do so, Steve has created a project tracking sheet. He also advises DNRC on Forest Service projects and drafts comments for projects. Probably 60-70% of the projects happening on federal land in the state get commented on by DNRC. Steve is a resource for BDWG because of the connection of the BDWG to the counties.
- The BDWG should talk with commissioners about BDNF projects, including what is strong on the project and what could be stronger.
- The first time you will see a project is on the five-year action plan. The restoration strategy the BDNF and BDWG is putting together should influence 5-year planning.

- Once a project is proposed a 30-day comment period starts. Contact Steve to compare notes and discuss the project at that point. When commenting, you want to have recommendations. That gives you interest in the outcomes.
- When a proposed action comes out, Steve looks for strengths and drafts comments. DNRC wants to see fire suppression access and if the project is meeting its goals – from DNRC’s perspective. DNRC also wants to know if the proposal increases the pace and scale.
- Recent DNRC comments have asked that, when treating in the Wildland Urban Interface, the Forest Service should make sure to be treating enough to drop the fire out of the forest crown. By 2050, models are predicting a four to six degree temperature increase and more intense droughts. There is the potential for the effects of fire to increase correspondingly.
- Sometimes there is a draft decision comment period. The DNRC comments at that time as well.
- After a decision there may be an objections process. That sounds negative but there can be a positive objection as well, for example, a positive objection could say, “The reason we are objecting is because we want to be at the table if you change the project due to other objections.” Positive objections are a tool for remaining part of the process. DNRC templates for positive objections are available for your use. To have standing in an objections process, the BDWG would have to have submitted a comment on the proposed action or the EA.
- Regarding litigation, you generally want an attorney to write an amicus. You do not have to intervene in a case to file an amicus, you just have to send a letter to the court requesting to be allowed to file an amicus. If the BDWG wants to get involved in litigation you could coordinate with DNRC.

Funding opportunities for collaboration (Willy Peck – see handout)

- Idaho Forest Group (IFG) tracks everything that they do with collaborative groups – all projects, all monitoring, etc. IFG has been involved in 21 projects that have been completed in the last three years and has worked on 23 projects that are in NEPA or are out the door.
- Willy has been meeting with non-profits working locally around Mineral County and Sanders County. Some of these non-profits are funded through Resource Advisory Committees (RAC), Forest Service grants, and non-federal grants. Willy encourages the BDWG to go for some of these same funding opportunities.
- Does the BDWG want to consider becoming a 501c3 or 501c6?
- Collaboratives can have a role in deciding where stewardship contracting dollars get spent and that money can be used for the BDWG to monitor projects. The Pacific Northwest Region of the Forest Service has been doing this.
- In the past, the Northern Region has supported collaboratives through the Collaborative Conservation and Land Stewardship Program but that program has stopped. The Montana Forest Collaboration Network and the Clearwater Basin Collaborative have been funded by the Northern Region as well.

Developments regarding the forest-wide restoration strategy (Anton Brennick – see Anton Brennick presentation)

- It needs to be said at the outset that this is all preliminary information at this point, so do not get too hung up on the specifics, as they will likely change.

- When doing the spatial analysis to identify priority landscapes for treatment, the BDNF produced priority landscape polygons that were an 80-90% match with the priority landscapes that the BDWG identified when working with Ecosystem Research Group.
- Chip Fisher is the chief architect behind all of this work. The BDNF is piloting this restoration strategy development process for the whole region and is in the seventh-inning stretch for completion.
- This restoration strategy is looking at the landscape from the 30,000-foot level, therefore it is strategic, while the five-year planning is tactical. Further, on-the-ground planning is at the operational-level.
- There were two scales of analysis used, planning areas (50 to 100 thousand acres) and timber course filter, which included areas allowed for timber cutting, appropriate slopes for cutting timber, near a road, and outside roadless areas.
- The Regional Forester has asked that all forests get on the same page and zoom out to the POD-level for prioritization.
 - The BDWG would like to gather local input on the restoration strategy before the final is inked.
- In one to three months Anton will come back with Chip Fisher to give a deeper dive into these areas.
- The BDNF is filling out their five-year program of work with a project near Whitehall called the Upper Little Whitetail and another near Ennis called the South Tobacco Roots. The BDNF is looking for feedback on these projects.
- It should be noted that municipal watersheds rank high in the modeling for values at risk from wildfire.
- Q: The BDNF could use the BDWG's help with the six-to-ten year planning. Does the BDWG want to help at the outset of this process or do they want to provide feedback on what the BDNF comes up with?
 - BDWG would like to provide feedback on what the BDNF comes up with.
- We can probably have that conversation at the May meeting.
- The BDNF has historically treated about four to six-thousand acres a year with fire. This year it will go up to eight or nine-thousand. Ideally the Forest would be at 10 to 15 thousand acres treated with fire per year. 60 to 80% of the fuels treatments are done within project areas, but it is also being done within aspen treatments.

Timelines for Selway Sagana and Strawberry Cascade projects, General Management Review of Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, partner roundtable, and update on the Resource Advisory Committees (Cheri Ford)

- The BDNF is building their fuels program by hiring three fuels planners. These are new positions. The BDNF is hiring three range positions this summer. The BDNF expects a slow ramp-up of their budget in coming years. A GS-13 BDNF Staff Officer position is open for applications. There are another 18 positions in the portal. The region said to get ready for hiring to open up, so the Forest has been preparing to hire a significant number of positions in the next few weeks. Only the three fuels planning positions are new. All others are filling existing gaps.

- The strike team has been working on the Rancho Deluxe and Greenhorn projects and are now on the Custer - Gallatin National Forest. The strike team has been asking the BDNF, "Where should we go next?"
- The BDNF is filling in gaps in their NEPA teams with the desired result of having a north zone NEPA team and a south zone NEPA team.
 - State Good Neighbor Authority resources could help fill some NEPA gaps on the Forest.
- Wisdom and Wise River District Ranger Molly Ryan has signed a couple new projects. Selway Sagana is tentatively scheduled for scoping in March.
- The draft Strawberry to Cascade Allotment Management Plan EIS will be out this spring. It will have a 45-day comment period.
- Each district is finishing their Integrated Restoration Strategy (IRS) mapping process. Can the BDWG help with public meetings regarding the public rollout of the IRS mapping?
 - Chris Marchion volunteered to support the Pintler District's public meeting.
- Friday, February 14th will be the RAC meeting where funds are distributed to the projects that applied for funds and were approved.
- This year is the five-year General Management Review of the BDNF. The BDNF may be reaching out to BDWG members regarding an associated in-person meeting. If the BDWG has ideas for how this meeting should be conducted, contact Jessica Schick or Cheri Ford.
- The BDNF is working with the BLM Dillon Office on the Trapper Creek Treatment Units. This is a cross-boundary project. The draft EA for this project will be released in early June, followed by a comment period.

Meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.