

Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group (BDWG) Meeting Record

3:00 – 5:00 PM, Wednesday, July 1, 2020
On Zoom

ATTENDANCE

Members: Tony Colter, timber representative; Maureen Connor, citizen-at-large; Chris Edgington, fishing representative; Tom Harrington, motorized recreation representative; Karen Laitala, quiet recreation and weeds representative; Chris Marchion, hunting representative; Darcie Warden, conservation representative

Technical advisors: Jeanne Dawson, Chip Fischer, Jeremy Keys, Jeff Tomac, and Jamie Tripp, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest (BDNF); Steve Kimball, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC); and Cindy Perdue-Dolan, Office of Senator Steve Daines

Facilitators: Ben Irely and Shauni Seccombe, National Forest Foundation (NFF)

Guests: Travis Anklam, NFF and Pedro Marques, Big Hole Watershed Committee

MEETING OUTCOMES

Decisions

- The June meeting record was approved.
- The “BDWG Accomplishments and Challenges” annual update for the Montana Forest Collaboration Network was approved with one amendment.

Action Items

- The BDWG Project Tracker can be viewed [HERE](#)
- Tom Harrington will share the article about forest management and prescribed burning, which was featured in the Smoke Jumper magazine last month.
- There is interest in identifying where past BDWG project area recommendations overlap with current Out-Year Planning areas (generate an overlay map).
- The group supports the creation of Geographic Subcommittees (i.e. Whitetail Subcommittee and South Tobacco Roots Subcommittee).
- There is interest in writing a letter in support of the science driving the Out-Year Planning process, and the corresponding Whitetail and South Tobacco Roots Planning Areas.
- Ben Irely and Jeanne Dawson will meet to discuss FACA.
- The BDWG Steering Committee will meet to discuss if the August meeting should be held over zoom or in-person.
- BDWG members to offer suggestions as to which district ranger should be invited to the August Meeting.

Bin Items

- The BDWG to provide Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest (BDNF) with feedback on out-year projects.

- The Montana Forest Action Advisory Council is meeting July 6 - 7 to finalize plan, after which a public comment period will be scheduled.
- DNRC is putting together a Joint Chiefs proposal on the Kootenai National Forest. BDWG should consider applying as well.
- BDWG is open to partnership opportunities for future collaborative project work (i.e. Big Hole Watershed Committee).
- If the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) passes, the BDWG expressed support for developing a Recreation Subcommittee to help the BDNF with potential developed recreation opportunities.
- BDWG would like to identify opportunities to establish permanent, developed recreation infrastructure while work is being done in the Whitetail Planning Area. Similarly, the Group would like to identify areas where recreation would be channeled in a way that is positive; to encourage use in acceptable areas.
- The Gravelly Landscape Collaborative is happy to offer support to the Forest Service in relation to forest management tools (cutting trees, prescribed burning, etc.).

MEETING RECORD

1. Welcome, introductions, approve meeting record

[Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group (BDWG) members reviewed and approve June meeting record. Members reviewed and approved the "BDWG Accomplishments and Challenges" annual update for the Montana Forest Collaboration Network with one amendment.]

2. Updates from the Dillon Ranger District

- **East Pioneer Project** – This project is focused on encroachment and fuels reduction. The BDNF received extensive comments, one of which included a 7-page comment from the Native Ecosystem Center. The comment focused on sage grouse and questioning the science used in analysis.
- **Selway Sagana** – Scoping will be completed by the end of July or early August on this project.
- **Pintler Face** – This project is close to completion. The BDNF is re-mapping around Lynx Analysis Units (LAU) and is waiting for more information and clear direction re: LAUs.
- **Tendoy Oil and Gas** – The BLM is the lead agency on this project. The plan is to move forward with the objection period before the end of the month.
- **Wisdom Wise River Repeater** – The BDNF is hoping for a decision in the next couple of weeks.

3. Congressional Updates

- The **Great American Outdoors Act** (GAOA) passed the Senate and is now on to the House of Representatives. House Minority Leader, Kevin McCarthy, has expressed support. If GOAO passes without any amendments, the President has agreed to sign it.
- A stand-alone **Cottonwood Fix** has been introduced by Senator Daines. The hope is that Senator Tester and Congressman Gianforte will support this again as they have in the past.
 - BDWG hopes legislation can fix the situation where grizzly bears hold up timber operations due to violations in road closures.
- **Feinstein-Daines Forestry Reform Bill** – Senator Daines is getting closer to introducing this bill into the Senate.

- Every two years the Senate holds a Western Caucus meeting in Montana. This meeting is planned for next month. The Senator is hoping it can be held in person. The Senator will be inviting some people from collaborative groups to attend.

4. BDNF Updates

- If the GAOA is passed, the BDNF would like to explore recreation infrastructure priorities and put a plans together.
 - The BDNF would like to identify capacity for, and gaps in, project implementation (current vacancies in engineering, site design, support staff). What would partners and community members like to see on the BDNF? What is our vision for developed recreation?
 - If GAOA passes, the BDWG expressed support for developing a Recreation Subcommittee to help in information sharing, capacity building, and prioritization of project work.
 - Since NEPA needs to be completed for numerous projects, the BDWG hopes that the BDNF will consider analyzing a broad area and having multiple projects be situated within that area.
- The BDNF is currently looking through hiring qualifications for the new Public Affairs Officer.
- Butte District Ranger position will be advertised next week. Dave Sabo is currently working for the Regional Office.
- The Tri-County Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) updates and revisions will be shared in the next few weeks.
- The BDNF is looking to bring on a Range Management Specialist in to the Dillon District.
- The BDNF brought on 19 – 20 new positions by way of the Direct Hiring Authority. All of these positions are either permanent full-time or permanent seasonal.
- Joselin is working on the Burton Park Project through a partnership effort with the Agricultural Conservation Experienced Services (ACES) program, which allows retired employees to return to service.

5. Member Updates

- Tom Harrington sent out an article as a follow up to the conversation about wildfire. The article is about forest management and prescribed burning, which was featured in the Smoke Jumper magazine last month. Also shared that the Friends of Pipestone have travel plan maps.
- **DNRC** – There are two executive orders moving along. The Montana Forest Action Advisory Council is meeting July 6 - 7 to finalize plan, after which a public comment period will be scheduled. The Climate Solutions Plan is moving towards finalization. The DNRC received \$9,000 from the local government grant to fund the BDWG facilitation position. The Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) report went out in May. There were 6 GNA sales awarded, 5 more are planned for October and 9 are planned for 2021. DNRC is currently working with Kootenai in crafting the Joint Chiefs Proposal for the fall. Now is a good time to create these competitive proposals since they involve a lot of detail.
- Only one CFLRP proposal will be chosen across the nation this year. About \$37 million of what Congress allocated for CFLRP this year is being used to fund the existing CFLRPs. The remaining \$3 million is available for one new project. The Secretary has not selected that one project yet.

6. Member Feedback on Out-Year Planning Priority Areas

- **Review:** Whitetail and South Tobacco Roots priority areas are both in the early stages of planning. BDNF will start with a Project Initiation Letter (PIL) and then convene the Interdisciplinary (ID) team. The NEPA process should begin in January or February of 2021. The BDNF is trying to be more proactive by setting up ID team with project goals, objectives, etc. The BDNF is aiming to have signed decisions by December of 2023, with implementation for the projects beginning in 2024. The process could change down the road (i.e. info from on-the-ground observations, a change in administration and the potential for a 90-day stand down, etc.).
- **BDWG Member Feedback on the BDNF's Out-Year Planning Process**
 - The BDWG has been wanting to do something like this - it doesn't match exactly with the restoration strategy that went into the CFLRP application but there's a lot of the same information in here. It's science-based and is a step in the right direction.
 - The BDWG is glad to see Whitetail as a priority area.
 - Whitetail is a popular, high-use area. The BDWG would like to identify opportunities to establish permanent, developed recreation infrastructure in the area while groundwork is being done. They would like to look at accessibility (areas close to municipalities, roads and popular areas) and the potential for new trails and campgrounds.
 - Conifer reduction is a good thing; it allows aspens to come back.
 - The BDWG would like to identify areas where recreation could be channeled in a way that is positive, to encourage use in acceptable areas, and to look at how timber activities could compliment recreation.
 - There's congestion in the Pipestone area - members would like to spread recreation out in this area.
 - There is a lot of support from ranchers in the Big Hole area for timber harvesting and interest in freeing up aspen clones.
 - There's a lot of conifer encroachment in the Gravelly Range and its affecting grazing and water. How can people get support to address these issues?
 - The Gravelly Landscape Collaborative is happy to offer support to the Forest Service in relation to forest management tools (cutting trees, prescribed burning, etc.).
 - There have been a lot of comments about conifer encroachment in the Whitetail area.
 - BDWG is feeling good about supporting the Out-Year Planning. This work is in alignment with previous BDWG work. The BDWG would like to see where past BDWG project area recommendations overlap with current Out-Year Planning areas by generating an overlay map.
 - This work dovetails with what the BDWG came out of the National Collaboration Cadre with.
 - The group supports the creation of Geographic Subcommittees (i.e. Whitetail Subcommittee and a South Tobacco Roots Subcommittee).
 - There is interest in writing a letter in support of the science driving the Out-Year Planning process, and the corresponding Whitetail and South Tobacco Roots Planning Areas.
 - Ben Irey and Jeanne Dawson will meet to discuss any Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA).

- The next BDWG meeting is planned for August 5, 2020. The BDWG Steering Committee will meet to discuss if the August meeting should be held over Zoom or in-person. BDWG members should offer suggestions as to which Ranger should be invited to the August Meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 5:04pm