

**Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group (BDWG)
Meeting Record**

3:00 to 5:00 p.m., Wednesday, February 3, 2021
On Zoom

MEETING SUMMARY

Attendance

Members: Commissioner Dan Allhands, Madison County; Tony Colter, timber representative; Maureen Connor, citizen-at-large; Chris Edgington, fishing representative; Tom Harrington, motorized recreation representative; Nick Jose, timber representative; Karen Laitala, quiet recreation and weeds representative; Chris Marchion, hunting representative; Commissioner Tom Rice, Beaverhead County; Darcie Warden, conservation representative; Commissioner Leonard Wortman, Jefferson County.

Technical advisors: Jeanne Dawson, Cheri Ford, Mike Goicoechea, and Jim McCoy, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest (BDNF); Steve Kimball, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC).

Stakeholders: John Meyer, Cottonwood Environmental Law Center; Emily Harkness, High Divide Collaborative; Commissioner Dan Sager, Powell County; David Laufenberg, Madison Conservation District; Tim Love, Montana Forest Collaboration Network; Bryan Lorengo, Montana Logging Association; Nathaniel Miller and Kendal Beauvais, University of Montana.

Facilitators: Travis Anklam and Ben Irely, National Forest Foundation

Decisions:

January meeting record approved without amendments.

Action items:

- Email Emily Harkness at emily@heart-of-rockies.org if you want to get on the High Divide Collaborative's mailing list.
- BDWG members on Facebook should find the BDNF posts, like them, and share them.
- Maureen Connor to draft letter to support Nick Jose's Smith-Beef Trail project proposal. Ben Irely to circulate draft letter to members for approval.
- Travis Anklam to compile list of goals generated in committee meetings for review at March 3 meeting.
- Ben Irely add Sean Claffey with The Nature Conservancy to the mailing list.
- Steve Kimball to follow up with the BDWG on home ignition zone information.
- Ben Irely add new BLM Dillon Field Manager Amanda James and Western Montana District Manager Katie Stevens to the email list.

Bin items:

- Ben Irely get the handout on Good Neighbor Authority from Greg Archie and distribute to BDWG.
- High Divide Collaborative will host a virtual workshop on April 6. Email Emily Harkness at emily@heart-of-rockies.org.

- Have Wildfire Adapted Missoula present to the BDWG on their work.
- Have BLM Dillon Field Manager Amanda James and Western Montana District Manager Katie Stevens present to the BDWG.
- Have Michael Albritton Fuels Specialist with the BLM, present on reintroducing wildland fire in the Wales Creek Study Area.
- John Meyer suggested Kathy Whitlock, a Montana State University professor as a good speaker re: effectiveness of fuel management on federal land in light of climate change.
- Have Sean Claffey with The Nature Conservancy, come and talk to the BDWG about cross-boundary monitoring.

MEETING RECORD

1. Welcome, introductions, approve meeting record

[BDWG members approved the January meeting record without amendments.]

2. BDNF project tracker question & answer

[BDWG members had no follow up questions after viewing the [project tracker](#)]

3, MT legislative update (information)

Tony Colter is testifying in front of the Natural Resource Subcommittee of the legislature in support of the Good Neighbor Authority tomorrow, along with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Regional Forester, the State Forester, and the Natural Resource Conservation Service Good Neighbor Authority Bureau Chief.

4. Cottonwood Rule discussion

[This item was moved to the March 3 meeting agenda.]

5. Overlaying the Montana Forest Action Plan on top of the BDNF's Out-Year Planning

[Attached are maps of how the Montana Forest Action Plan overlays with the BDNF Out-Year planning areas. Thanks to Chip Fisher on the BDNF for putting these maps together.]

6. Forest Action Plan Project Proposal

- Sun Mountain Lumber is submitting a Forest Action Plan grant proposal and is looking for a letter of support from the BDWG.
 - Putting together this proposal was a collaborative effort with Randy Smith, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) and the Montana Logging Association.
 - The project will take place on state lands. Randy has the grazing rights on that state section. The area is within the Butte wildland urban interface (WUI) and is within a mile of a Butte subdivision.
 - The proposal will reduce fuels and increase forest health by cleaning out Douglas fir. There will be 250 acres of harvest resulting in about 730,000 board feet. Dead lodgepole will be removed to reduce fuel loading. Aspen stand will be restored by removing all conifers within 100 feet. 3,000 feet of slash fencing will be created to protect aspen stands from grazing. Three new culverts will be placed and other road improvements will be made. \$1500 worth of noxious weed chemical will be given to the landowner for treatments in the

project area. Part of the grant request will go toward getting students from Montana Tech out to tour the project site. Native grass seed will be seeded on disturbed soils.

- Improved road access and reduced fuels will help protect the integrity of the power lines through the area. The area is important for elk winter range so timber for thermal and hiding cover will be retained.
- The grant request is for \$158,000. \$86,000 of that will pay for the mechanical treatment. The treatments would not otherwise pay for itself. There is going to be a lot of non-saw material removal. Temporary roads will be built and obliterated. Harvest will be limited to outside of the hunting season and FWP would like to see it harvested in winter, so there will be some snow plowing costs.
- What is the current public access?
 - There is only walk-in access.
- The Smith Ranch has had a Block Management Agreement with FWP for the last 25 years. The landscape is of significant importance for wildlife. The elk herd there is at about one-thousand head and the area is good winter range.
- Was this piece of ground part of the recent burn?
 - No. The fire did not reach this section.
- Maureen will produce a letter for member approval this week. Nick will send Maureen a copy of the proposal.

7. Partner Presentation: High Divide Collaborative

[See attached presentation]

- The concept of the High Divide Collaborative is that it is the land that bridges the Crown of the Continent to the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. The Collaborative came together in 2013. The premise behind the Collaborative was to get Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF) out on the landscape, realizing that an application from a collaborative would be more competitive than an application from any one agency alone.
- Most of the LWCF's \$30 million has been spent on access, fee title, and wildlife habitat purchases – including elk range along the Madison River.
- The Collaborative's members are primarily non-governmental organizations and agencies, but there are also some large landowners involved.
- After the LWCF funds were allocated, the Collaborative developed shared priorities on the landscape and it is a pretty big list of priorities. The Collaborative considers these priorities as their guiding principles. While community resilience is not on there, it is at the core of everything we do.
- The Collaborative has started the Connectivity, Forestry, and Fire working groups and they are going to be the main, driving force within the Collaborative moving forward.
- In 2020 the Fire Working Group put on the Aspen Workshop. The Group is planning on doing an aspen workshop this year as well.
- The Collaborative was recently awarded some money for landscape conservation design through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The Collaborative is creating a spatial representation of community priorities to inform decision-makers.
- The Collaborative was just awarded a grant through NRCS to evaluate the efficacy of different tools to mitigate the risk of grizzly and wolf predation.

- The Collaborative is having a workshop on April 6 focused on food security and amenity migration. Send an email to Emily to get on the mailing list and get signed up.
- BDWG question: Is there a landowner group in the Centennials and do they participate in your collaborative?
 - Yes and they are a part of our NRCS grant.
- BDWG comment: One thing the BDWG is talking a lot about right now is getting more fire on the landscape. The BDWG would like to engage with the High Divide Collaborative on this.
 - What are you working on specifically regarding fire? The High Divide Collaborative has been mainly focused on aspen restoration and building capacity so far. Jeanne Dawson has been a part of these conversations in the past.
- BDWG comment: It seems like the High Divide Collaborative should be concerned about stand replacing fire and the threat to recent acquisitions.
 - The High Divide Collaborative would agree. Michael Albritton, fuels specialist with the BLM was the main speaker at our workshop at Fairmont Hotsprings was talking about using fire to reduce fuel load on the Blackfoot, which was an extremely informative presentation. The BDWG should consider having this same speaker.

8. Partnership, Capacity, Communications, and Recreation committee updates

Partnership Committee

- During the Partnership Committee meeting the issue that really stood out was the use of fire and the Committee's role in helping to educate the public and landowners.
- The Partnership Committee is going to engage with the Forest's Potential Operational Delineation (PODs) process. The PODs process defines land areas and get agreement ahead of time for handling fire in that area.
- The Committee also talked about getting University of Montana Western involved in monitoring, particularly where fires have come through; building more cross-boundary partnerships on upcoming priority areas and reaching out to landowners.
- The Committee is going to have Sean Claffey with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) come in and present to the group.
- It was mentioned that the BDWG has got to get back to meeting face to face with some of these landowners.

Recreation Committee

- The Recreation Committee had an informative presentation and discussion with Noelle Meier, Recreation, Wilderness, and Trails Program Manager, about the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) and the impact of COVID-19 on recreation.
- Noelle's presentation solidified the timeline and status GAOA. GAOA can be broken into two funding sources, the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the backlog and maintenance fund. The Forest Service receives about 15% of the backlog and maintenance fund. When GAOA was rolled out there was some concern with how the projects were picked. The Forest Service had a 90-day turn around and so not a lot of time for public input. As Noelle explained, they were building the airplane as they were flying it. Expect this process to get smoother in the next couple of years. There are some new positions at the Regional Office and the Washington

Office to help implement the GAOA. Hopefully there will be some boilerplate language so that the Forest Service can get contracts out for work they do not have the capacity for.

- Noelle talked about the effect of COVID-19 on recreation on the Forest, which increased the user days. This happened to be the year for National Visitor Use Monitoring data collection on the Forest so we should see those numbers forthcoming.
- The 2021 goals for the Committee will be: 1) work with the BDNF on FY2023 project recommendations for GAOA, and 2) identify conflict among different user groups and strategies to address those conflicts. The Committee has also been talking about how to deal with the increased need for law enforcement and rescue response on the Forest.

Capacity Committee

- The Capacity Committee will send out their goals for 2021 and look for members to amend them. At the next meeting we can go over them in more detail.
- The Committee wants the collaborative to get involved in BDNF projects up front so that we can make substantive comments. The Committee also wants to continue working on a restoration roadmap. This would show what the next 5-10 years of timber harvests and prescribed fire would be. The Committee will also meet with the Regional Forester and the Montana delegation.

Communications Committee

- For the January meeting, Catherine Mcrae, the Public Affairs Specialist, was able to tour Sun Mountain Lumber's Meadow Creek logging job and create video. Commissioner Sager joined as well and gave a description of the Secure Rural Schools program and the history of timber sales in the area. Catherine also got a tour of the Sun Mountain mill and interviewed Tony Colter. The Committee is going to be interviewing a BDWG member each month. Up next will be Steve Kimball, then Commissioner Rice.
- A lot of the Committee's action plan revolves around traditional media. This probably needs to change to a heavier focus on social media, at least until we can convene in person.
- Go to the BDNF homepage to see Catherine's recent posts.
- Members with Facebook accounts should like member interviews and spread the word.

8. Public Comment

John Meyer – I recommend the BDWG have Kathy Whitlock, a Montana State University professor, talk about the effectiveness of fuel management on federal lands in light of climate change. We do a lot of engaging private landowners to inform them that it is really only the 100 meters around their house that impacts how their house can withstand wildfire.

Jim McCoy – John, what are you advocating for in that discrete zone around the house?

John Meyer – For years people have been told you need to harvest in the WUI. We are asking the Forest Service to start looking at research coming out of the Missoula Fire Lab that says you don't need to log a half mile from a home. You only need to log in the 100 yards around the home.

Steve Kimball –Wildfire Adapted Missoula (WAM) is a good model for how the Forest Service is working with landowners to treat immediately around the home then extending beyond. The BDWG might want to have a presentation from WAM.

Tim Love – John’s point is true just for structure protection, but we are also talking about protecting properties. The Montana Forest Collaboration Network (MFCN) is working with Western Collaborative Conservation Network to set up a virtual workshop, September 9-12. The Recreation Committee mentioned GAOA, MFCN recently posted an issue paper on that subject.