

MEETING NOTES
MFRC – LOLO FOREST RESTORATION COMMITTEE MEETING
MAEDC, Missoula, MT.
Dec. 9, 2008 @ 6 – 8:30p

🔗 Announcement or Agenda Additions 🔗

New York Times Article-

A recent New York Times article, which can be read at (http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/09/us/09timber.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=Seeley,%20Montana&st=cse) discussed timber in Montana. It quotes various members of the MFRC and shows how timely and relevant this effort is. There seems to be a shift in perceptions due to this effort and restoration is being discussed for the new administration. Debbie got an e-mail from the Utah Forest Supervisor asking questions about our group because they are forming a similar group.

There is also an effort to connect economic stimulus with “green jobs.” The Forest Service was asked by Senate to provide information and there is a push from conservation groups to connect green jobs with global warming efforts and to look at various environmental impacts on a local level. There will be press releases from national environmental organizations on Thurs.

Communications – discussion added to the agenda for later in the evening.

Note: Brian has Cameron's proxy in perpetuity.

🔗 NEPA Presentation 🔗

Chris gave a detailed NEPA presentation. The topics he presented on were NFMA law, regulation and policy, NEPA law, regulation and policy, steps to planning proposed actions, EIS and alternatives, project effects analysis, mitigation, comment period requirements, and decisions.

There was extensive discussion by the group, reflecting diverse viewpoints on NEPA, how it has evolved, and what reforms might be possible. The presentation/discussion took up the bulk of the meeting. (See further notes, below.)

🔗 Report from the Westside WG 🔗

Bev gave a lovely visual presentation with Christmas lights to demonstrate how the group has had moments of darkness, but are now moving toward the light. With some miscommunications in the past, they group feels they are now on the same page.

One lesson learned was the importance of having the FS at all of the meetings, so now there is an open invitation to the FS for all of the meetings.

The EA for the S. Fork of Fish is coming out in Feb.

Denley is the sole rep for Cedar Thom because it is hard for others to get up there. There has been talk of a 3rd working group to really represent the Superior, Plains and Thompson Falls areas.

Plains/Superior is starting a new project and there have been some challenges in the past that this project will also be facing, and they apply to the principles, but it is not within the capacity of the Westside group to attend those meetings.

There is also a blank line on the FS five year plan for the Missoula District, so Jan. is the time to begin discussing places.

Jan. 22 @ 6pm – is the next Cedar Thom meeting at the District Office.

🔗 Report from the Eastside WG 🔗

The group reached consensus on Center Ridge and will send out the evaluation document so that the group can look it over and it can be discussed at the next meeting.

The draft EA for Auggie will be out in Jan.

Next meeting – the Eastside group requests full committee consensus for the Center Ridge evaluations.

🔗 Report from the OHV WG 🔗

The Middle Creek proposal will wait until spring to be looked at.

🔗 Communication 🔗

There was an issue discussed about an article written in the paper about work being done in Seeley. It was not in connection with and FRC project, but the article invoked the spirit of the MFRC. The group discussed this issue in depth and agreed there is a distinction between talking on behalf of the group and just saying that another project was inspired by the MFRC. Still, it is important to understand that even invoking the name can bring rise to issues we are not involved with or could tie us to projects we are not tied to. So, we must just be attentive to what we are saying and how we are saying it, so that lines are not blurred between what we are doing and what others are doing.

The executive committee is working on a media/communications policy so that we have guidelines for communication.

☞ NEPA Continued ☞

The following notes capture the flavor of the discussion, various viewpoints, and is not intended to reflect the group's unanimous "conclusion".

The group decided that this was an important issue to continue discussing. There have been drastic changes in forest management – 20 years ago we were cutting a lot of trees and building roads, and now we aren't. Social concerns, economic concerns and monitoring in some ways have changed management concerns – and they have been adapting and changing along the way. There has been an effort to keep the public involved – but in the view of some, the process is so elaborate that it has been taken over by researchers and analysts. And the public is left to wonder why nothing is getting done.

It is a complex process, but it does not have to be so complex that it is removed from public participation. The public can look at something and see that it is well-managed. This is where our group makes sense – people are getting together and working through the process.

The hope is that we can get to point where we understand the science so that when we develop and design projects, we can use common sense and can mold the process to do the right thing. Often now, no one looks at the ground work – just the documents and if those have holes, they go to court.

There are also public misconceptions that must be overcome – such as the notion that all logging is clearcutting.

Right now the process is not publicly accessible. People don't have good information or know enough about ecology and forest management.

A good example of this would be the pigs and the Peas Farm.

There are also inherent biases within the FS scientists, that is hopefully being managed by having interdisciplinary ID teams. And a final decision is up to the Ranger to take an unbiased view.

Also, many of the comments submitted only focus on one element of the science, so it would be nice if the FS could comment on a comment and apply the whole science to it.

Inevitably people care about all sides of the issues. But, when they wanted their concerns known, and wanted an agency to take action, this was the process they had to go through and it made agencies think of the environmental impacts of a project, which is a good thing. But, the question then becomes, if the agencies are now used to thinking in this way, is this system still an appropriate way to engage the public. Is it still

beneficial and applicable or can there be changes to it and new ways to involve the public? Collaboration is one way.

It is not a matter of getting rid of NEPA, but just creating a new law with NEPA in place that may ease some of the bottleneck that the FS goes through in preparing documents and implementing projects. It's not a matter of putting a "new coat of paint" on NEPA, but creating a new model. What we are doing here is important and could maybe help create that new mechanism or rule.

🔗 Report from Executive Committee 🔗

The group voted to move the charter discussion and approval to the next meeting.

🔗 Next Meeting 🔗

Jan. 13 – 6 – 8:30 pm
MAEDC