

Montana Forest Restoration Committee

Meeting Notes

May 20, 2009

9am-4pm

Heritage Hall

3255 Ft. Missoula Rd.

MFRC Members – Pam Gardner, Brian Kahn, Dan Thompson, Will Geer, Len Broberg, Rick Franke, Dave Bull, Chuck Roady, Jake Kreilick, Tim Love, Marnie Criley, Julia Altemus, Dale Harris, Gordy Sanders, Karen DiBari, Jack Rich, Debbie Austin, and Bob Harrington.

Guests - Karen Mollander, Eric Johnston, Beverly Dupree, Chris Partyka, Mo Hartman, Adam Rissen, Bill Grasser, Kurt Thompson, Linda Brander, Steve Kratville, Tom Tidwell, Mike Palladini, Scott Brennan, Amber Kamps, Bruce Fox, Anne Dahl

Staff – Melissa Hayes, Chelsea Pennick, Marci Giblin, Julia Altemus, Marnie Criley

*FACA Reminder

The important difference between the MFRC and a Federal Advisory Committee is the role of the FS. In the MFRC, the FS is a participant, not a convener – they participate only in an advisory capacity. The purpose of the MFRC is to develop the Principles that the FS can help apply. It was recommended that MFRC not become a FACA organization, and it is always good to check back in on this issue and make the distinction clear.

*New MFRC Coordinator

Marnie is the new part-time coordinator for the MFRC. The SC decided that the MFRC needed additional help based on the workload and where we want to go in the future. Nine people applied for the position, and 4 were interviewed. The position is part-time/20 hrs. per week. Marnie will no longer be the chair of the LRC or a voting member of the SC.

*Minutes

↳ Approved as presented

*Financial Report

↳ Approved as presented

*FRC Updates

*Lolo RC

The Full LRC is meeting every other month and the working groups meet every month, or as needed. Most members attend all the meetings with the FS attending regularly. The most significant change (and success) for this group are the relationships, which have grown - especially relationships with the FS and ID teams. Rennick Stark is a new potential project. Mineral/Sanders Co. came to a meeting and gave a presentation, and expressed an interest in working with the LRC. They may not want to take on the Principles, but they are interested in the process. The challenge is how to merge with an existing collaborative. There is a new ranger on the Missoula District, starting June 21.

Westside Working Group (WWG) – the EA for the S. Fork of Fish Creek will be out soon. The group is working to speed up the process, but for the first project, it is good to have

time to work through issues and get to know each other. One of the successes of this project has been in building relationships with the landowners. The WWG will work with the FS regarding a monitoring protocol. Sharon Sweeney would like to use the Principles for the Cedar Tom project, but it has been difficult for LRC members to attend meetings. Discussion has been given to forming a "true" Westside working group and splitting the LRC into three WGs. Wood Gulch may be the first Missoula project.

Eastside Working Group (EWG) – Auggie is on the ground. Center Ridge is being pushed back for now. **more detail on Auggie below (Case Study).

***Bitterroot RC**

Darby Lumber Lands – 9 sections were transferred to the Bitterroot. Some of the roads developed by the timber company have been inventoried, but not all. There is opportunity for restoration and recreation. Butterfly Creek Project – access was an issue in this area. Though the group agreed it was a viable project, there is only a road by a creek, which caused a concern. It was also agreed that there needs to be permanent access in the future for maintenance. The group suggested reconstructing a minimum standard road utilizing existing prisms as much as possible. The road next to the creek will become a trail that will serve as a horse route. Ginny will stay to facilitate through Feb.

***Lincoln RC**

First meeting was in October. The dynamic of the group is pretty good, although they are looking for additional environmental representation. The community supports the effort and is looking forward to results. There was a field trip, where Amber Kamps and Tom Deluca discussed 4 sites. The group agreed on 3. The dynamics of these projects will be discussed at the June meeting. Paul Roos and KD Feedback are the co-chairs of the Lincoln Working group.

***Case Study – Auggie**

Scott and Tim gave a presentation on the evolution of the Auggie project. The EWG created an evaluation form that they used throughout the process. The FS also completed a self-evaluation form on the project as it related to the Principles. It was helpful to fill out and discuss the evaluation form, go on field trips and conduct regular meetings. During the Auggie comment period, the FS received 6 comments with good feedback.

Some of the lessons learned on this project:

The Principles work. Membership matters – local knowledge and relationships, diversity of interests & knowledge are important. Understanding the agency process is important. The evaluation structures the conversation. Important to understand what is and is not restoration – and it is ok for the project to not include every Principle. A project can include restoration prescriptions and non restoration prescriptions, as long as you call everything what it is. There should be multiple projects in the pipeline.

Next Steps: The monitoring plan will be formalized and signed at the end of June. Units are being prepped and students from U of M and the high school in Seeley will participate in monitoring.

***Forest Landscape Restoration Act (FLRA) – R1 Recovery Projects**

This Act is part of the Omnibus Lands Bill and will look at large areas (50,000+ acres) and work through the collaborative process to reach consensus on restoration. Funds are not appropriated, but proposals should still be submitted. The Act says that the Secretary can select up to 10 projects a year, with no more than 2 in each region. No timeline yet for selecting or submitting project proposals. That should not prevent us from starting.

R1 Recovery Projects – the decision criteria for these projects is jobs, so they may be focused around a few counties in the state – places that need it more than others. There is an expectation that regions will share any excess funding that they were not able to use. There is opportunity to leverage resources and get more work done.

***Monitoring Report**

The goal is to develop a broad monitoring template that will help the FS as well as add pieces that would be valuable to the MFRC and the Principles. It would create consistency for what is being looked at across the landscapes. The template will work around the principles but also include ecological, social and economical components. Once a draft is complete, it will be taken to the committees for feedback. It is uncertain who will house the data. For Auggie, U of M has offered and for S. Fork of Fish, maybe the FS because they have already done a lot of monitoring. Possibly the data could be kept with the coordinator so that we know where it is if we need it in the future. **Monitoring could also become a section of the Annual Report.**

***Restoration of Mixed Conifer, Beetle Kill**

Amber Kamps gave a presentation on fire regimes and their classification on the landscape. These issues (beetle kill/salvage) come up on almost every project. It may be time to discuss this issue. The complexity of this issue might not lend itself to a broad principle, but there could be site-specific opportunities where it could be qualified as “restoration.” It is something we should begin to work on. If we keep doing projects, we are going to keep bumping into the issue. The public at large is concerned about beetle kill. This committee is mature enough now to discuss these issues.

Developing a principle may be a problem – what is the issue that we are trying to address? There is some skepticism that there would not always be a restoration motive surrounding beetle kill and salvage projects. So, it would be important to acknowledge the intent of the group in taking on projects in this landscape and need to look fully at all of the science surrounding the issue. At first glance on a beetle mortality map, it would look like all of the trees are dead when taken out of context, but that is not the case. A mixed severity regime brings a lot of complex issues and challenges that we would need to be fully aware of.

If we look at a philosophy of what we want to leave behind, then that could frame the discussion and allow us to formulate what we need to take.

The Swan has a lot of mixed severity, and if the committee could come up with principles, that could be a great balance.

Climate is another issue to address, and we need to prepare the forests for the future. A regional team is working on climate change issues – such as CO₂ emissions from fires, a carbon tax, cap and trade. The team is also working on carbon sequestration and the amount of carbon generated during wildfires.

Committee volunteers: Julia, Len, Jake, Amber (advisory), Gordy, Mark, Chris P. (advisory), Brian, and someone from TWS?

***Communications**

According to the MFRC Charter, the SC's promotes the MFRC, and our successes. There continues to be internal pushback at times, and timing of letters, press releases, etc are an issue.

The Committee was reminded of the authority that is given the SC committee by the members of the MFRC and that individual members do not represent groups, rather a specific interest.

Forming an **Ad Hoc communications subcommittee** was discussed. Those that want to, can opt-in to be included in reviewing and commenting on certain communications. If you opt-in you have the obligation to respond and comment.

***MFRC Project Timeline**

An Implementation Committee is needed to speed things through the process – both ours and the FS. **Len & Julia will meet with Chris P to review the framework and see if there are places it could be streamlined.** Once there is a draft, Woods Gulch would be a good pilot project.

***State Roundup**

ReDesign – There is money available for state and private forestry projects – for competitive redesign projects. In the first year, Montana had 3 projects and a top-ranked project for the West. The 2nd year we had 2 projects. We ID where we have restoration needs on adjoining private lands, but where funds are not available, then submit a proposal.

ReDesign Website: http://www.stateforesters.org/2008_Redesign_Report_Card

JumpStart Grant – fuels funding. Jumpstart II & III money would come from stimulus – about \$8 million, which we don't have a formal award letter on yet.

The 2008 Farm Bill requires state foresters develop a statewide forest assessment.

***Comments, Concerns, & Suggestions**

The Bitterroot is concerned with the process and the length of time it takes, so anything this group can do to help the FS would be helpful.

NFF did outreach in Utah to form a similar collaborative and they now have a SC which continues to meet.

Tom Tidwell's comments about urgency will be addressed when Julia and Len meet with Chris. FLRA, we need to figure out what role we want to play since this is a longer, on-going effort for 10 years. **We could draft a letter of support for the projects and get our name out there**

Swan – Gordy will visit with the FS about interest in creating an FRC.

*** Summary & Next Steps**

3 topics that have come up throughout the day:

Urgency

Funding

Taking on the difficult.

We have the opportunity to expand into the Flathead, Swan, etc. as well as taking the model to other states and DC. We can also build momentum and get things done by working with other organizations. As for funding, the group needs to decide what our future is – and how much/fast we want to grow. The SC is dealing with the question of growth.