

BITTERROOT RESTORATION COMMITTEE (BRC)

March 15, 2010

Session Summary

SESSION OBJECTIVES

1. Updates on MFRC Web site, "Roundtable" discussions and biomass
2. Review discussion ground rules and process
3. Take next steps on Three Saddle and the Darby Lumber Lands
4. Learn current status of Butterfly Creek
5. Hear from Forest Service about their experience with BRC during last year

COMMITTEE MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Bill Grasser	Chris Clancy	Wayne Hedman
Mike Jeffords	Gary Milner	Paul Moore
Ron Porter	Steve Powell	Adam Rissien
Kirk Thompson	Marcia Hogan (Facilitator)	

TECHNICAL ADVISORS/OBSERVERS

Julia Altemus	Dave Campbell	Marnie Criley
Dan Ritter	Julie King	Cole Mayn
Mac Donofrio		

COMPLETED AGENDA ITEMS

The Committee congratulated Julie King on becoming the new Bitterroot Forest Supervisor.

Approval of Minutes

BRC members approved the February minutes.

Updates

MFRC Steering Committee Co-Chair Report

Bill Grasser and Adam Rissien didn't have specifics to report because the MFRC Steering Committee meeting is March 16. The committee discussed posting BRC minutes on the new MFRC Web site. No one had a problem with such postings.

Roundtable Discussion

Julia Altemus talked about the February roundtable discussion hosted by the MRFC Steering Committee to address the impacts of the Smurfit-Stone Container Corporation's plant closure on the forest products industry and the restoration of Montana's forests. She said participants felt the roundtable was useful because there has been a lot of discussion about what to do with the Smurfit-Stone plant, but not about how to maintain the forest products infrastructure through the closure, as well as the recession. The roundtable participants developed a list of possible actions to take to address the impacts. The participant agreed to meet in March to look more closely at the short term actions and determine who might commit to what they determine to be priorities.

Montana Forest Restoration Committee

MFRC meets May 26 from 10 to 4. They are looking for a lunchtime speaker. Someone suggested Brian Long speak about mortality in burned areas.

Biomass

Altemus said there's good information about biomass at:

<http://dnrc.mt.gov/forestry/Assistance/Biomass/default.asp>. She noted there is a patent (pending?) for converting carbon to a liquid without a smokestack. Google standard alcohol for more information.

Review of Ground Rule and Process

The new facilitator asked the group to review the discussion ground rules and process so she could understand how the committee has agreed to operate. Comments included the following:

- Courtesy is important for developing "good-will" relationships. It would be hard to reach consensus without extending courtesy and good will to each other.
- Being succinct is laudable, but requires some management by the facilitator.
- In regards to consensus, when someone says they can't go along with something, they need to offer another option. One can't just say "no." One person said the group has reached consensus on minor issues, but lacked a definition for what "moving forward" means. Another person said it's "where we go and ends when we stop." One person said sometimes it's unclear where the committee's role stops and the agency's role begins. In response, someone said the committee only makes recommendations to the Forest Service; the agency is responsible to a larger public and program, not just the committee. Therefore BRC consensus is a recommendation or zone of agreement of the committee members, who represent a variety of community interests.
- Between-meeting discussion is not intended to mean members cannot talk to each other. Rather members should not have discussions that result in an alliance, which comes to the table with a pre-set position or issue.

Discussion with Forest Service

At the February meeting, some committee members expressed frustration with their expectations for the Butterfly Creek Project once they had developed a collaborative framework and asked the Forest Service “to move it forward in their environmental analysis process.”

Forest Supervisor Julie King said Butterfly Creek is not dead, but now part of the Daily-Gold project and the forest will collect data this summer. She said Butterfly Creek could not be a stand-alone project for a variety of reasons. In the future, when projects are turned over to the Forest Service, the committee and agency need to clarify what this means (i.e., what happens next) to prevent future misunderstanding. She said it won't always be simple or quick to proceed especially if consensus produces a small project that can't stand on its own. One year is unrealistic in such circumstances. King also suggested it might be easier to jump on a “moving ship.” At same time, she regrets some members' expectations were not met on Butterfly and will watch for it in the future.

King said the committee's work is valuable to the forest. They feel the relationships built by the BRC have created a more positive and helpful community environment in which to do forest work. King said perhaps the Forest Service can serve as a better resource to the committee, noting the forest has not wanted to corrupt the committee process and has been cautious in their participation. Deputy Forest Supervisor Cole Mayn said there's a fine line between input and influence and they are trying to be sensitive to that.

The facilitator asked Marnie Criley and Julia Altemus if they had any observations from attending other restoration committee meetings. Altemus said committees need to keep in mind that they can only make recommendations to the Forest Service or they will violate FACA. Criley encouraged the Forest Service to share their cautions and concerns if they had them. She added that on the Lincoln RD, a 1000-acre, committee-recommended project had been folded into a larger project.

One person recalled false starts and expectations with other pre-BRC collaborative efforts like Frazier Draw. Another person commented it's important to pay attention to history, but collaboration is not impossible and requires everyone to give a little especially if the committee is going to get something done. One person said there were “red flags” and he felt the committee too “fumbled” when they passed off Butterfly.

Three Saddle Project

In January, the committee decided to consider restoration on four sections that are part of a proposed project known as Three Saddle on the Stevensville Ranger District.

Dan Ritter briefed the committee. February 26 was the deadline for initial public “scoping” comments. A Forest Service team meets March 17 to develop issues based on these comments. They hope to complete the environmental analysis and make a decision about Three Saddle in spring 2011.

One member asked about the possibility of making a separate decision on the four sections to be considered by the committee. He expressed concern that the larger project might be appealed based on the scoping letters. He also felt the four sections restoring Ponderosa pine and Western larch “fit” the restoration principles, but that might not be the case with the larger project area. One person responded that the restoration principles represent a nexus of biological, economic and social principles. Another person said it’s early in the process and scoping comments would shape the outcome. Two members expressed an interest in looking at the larger project area. One of them said there could be sections with forest health or road restoration needs even though they weren’t low-elevation pine or larch forests.

While some members were concerned that broadening the project would increase the chance of failure, others felt the committee should challenge itself and look beyond “risk-free” sections.

The committee decided to start with a visit to the four agreed upon sections on Wednesday, April 21. Committee members will meet at the Stevensville RD at 9:30 for an all-day field trip lasting until around 4:00.

Darby Lumber Lands

BRC didn’t do additional work on this project.