

Montana Forest Restoration Committee
Steering Committee Meeting
DNRC Conference Room
March 16, 2010
2-5pm

Members: Adam Rissien, Gordy Sanders, Bill Grasser, Orville Daniels, Julia Altemus

Phone: Scott Brennan, Chuck Roady, Dale Harris, Brian Kahn

Proxy: Mary (by Dale)

Staff: Marnie Criley & Melissa Hayes

Guests: Marsha Hogan, Debbie Austin, Steve Kratville, & Julia Riber

•• **February Minutes** ••

👉 Feb. minutes - Approved.

•• **February Financial Report** ••

Julia moved to approve; Adam seconded.

👉 Feb. financial report - Approved.

•• **Funding for the next fiscal year** ••

This was not a listed agenda item, but is an important discussion. Dale and Gordy met with Leslie yesterday about MFRC and where we are headed. The sooner we prepare a request for the next fiscal year, the better (*but no later than mid-July*). There has been discussion of getting the original group together for a discussion about moving forward. Add this to the Agenda and prepare something with actual numbers. The annual report won't be complete before the budget is due, but we can prepare a semi-annual report/update like we did last year.

During the next funding request we should look at developing a new cost-share agreement that looks from the original partnership to where we are now and then plans for the future (for example, the coordinator position was not envisioned in the first agreement). Because the original agreement talked in a broad sense of convening people and we are now doing that in specific places, with on the ground project implementation, we also need to understand the relationship with FACA. Crafting a new agreement would allow the group to discuss its vision for the future, what funds we need and where they would come from. Until the funds from the first agreement were expended, the group would operate under the 2 agreements and then move into the new agreement. But, the exact logistics should be part of the larger discussion. **Dale** will follow up with Steve and organize a meeting with Gordy, Julia, Steve, Bob and Marci. Additionally how will this meeting and new agreement involve the financial committee and what should they be doing to aid in the process.

•• **Roundtable Re-Cap & Next Steps** ••

The minutes for the meeting were sent out, but the agenda was not circulated to the SC. The discussion will continue with a focus on short-term items and issues. The meeting classified items into short-term (6mo.-1yr); mid-term (2 years); and long-term (beyond 2 years). So, the next meeting will look at opportunities for contractors on the ground and keeping the existing infrastructure alive. There were 4 sectors or groupings of issues also identified at the discussion: Private, Legislative Action, Administrative/Government, and Grant/Funding

Opportunities. These four areas will then become the topics for sub-groups to explore. Mostly everyone is able to be at the next meeting and Congressional staffers that have been able to attend say this roundtable is filling a void that is not being addressed by any other group/effort.

Next Roundtable Meeting: Friday, March 19, 2010 at the DNRC, Southwest Land Office (SWLO) from 1-3pm.

•• **Scott's Presentation** ••

Scott Brennan made a presentation in Boise at the Society of American Forester's Conference on the topic of biomass and methods that could be used to calculate biomass within a given landscape. He outlined approaches by discussing the work being done on the Seeley as well as prioritization models that have been used on the Lolo and Lincoln. Scott also gave a short presentation on The Wilderness Society's role in the MFRC and highlighted some principles and shared the importance of staying within the Zone of Agreement. A good Q&A session followed and Scott gave away copies of the Principles and Annual Report as well as directing people to the website for more information. There were a diverse representation of organizations and interests – a lot of forest service folks, plus the Elk Foundation, Industry representatives, University of Idaho, amongst many others.

•• **SC Membership Review** ••

Rick Franke has withdrawn and was replaced with Chuck Roady.

Will Geer would also like to withdraw from the SC because of time constraints, but would like to still remain on the full committee. It was suggested that Al Christopherson replace Will. Al will be retiring in June, but is still going to be engaged and would be a great asset.

👉 **Vote:** everyone is ok with visiting with Al and asking him to replace Will.

•• **FACA/Chief's Testimony** ••

FS Planning Rule

The FS has initiated a new planning rule and is hosting nationwide roundtables to gauge what people would like to see in a new planning rule. These meetings are open to the public. The Region 1 meeting will be held in Missoula on April 13 at the Holiday Inn Parkside. The roundtable/panel discussions will be held from 9:30-4:30 with an Open House to follow from 5:30-7:30. The meeting will be facilitated by a US environmental conflict resolution organization. **Julia Riber** will look into who is on the DC Science panel.

••**Chief's Testimony**

The Chief referenced the possibility of a new appeals and objections process as mentioned in the 2011 budget as part of the integrated restoration pilot project (section 7, pages 76 &78 in the budget). Washington is looking to modify the appeals and regulations process to look like the objections process that is currently used for HFRA. In this process, people who comment can meet with a line officer to voice their objections before the decision is signed. This seems to work for the public as well, but the process is only available under the HFRA.

••**FACA**

At a recent NEPA 101 training, where over 60 people went through the training, many of them were interested in learning more about FACA, which also brings up issues in terms of MFRC work and the MFRC learning more about FACA. Since many of the FRCs are now doing more 'on the ground' work and engaging in projects with the FS, it is helpful to understand FACA and how we discuss projects and how that discussion can be perceived by the public. Additionally, FACA is a viable way to challenge a project. In a recent Idaho case about sheep management, the

court found the FS was not in compliance with FACA and so any decisions made by the committee had to be redone.

A major part our increased collaboration, then, is in understanding the sideboards. Even though FACA applies to the Agency, they deal with the public and the MFRC, so it is important the members of the MFRC understand the potential issues. It is also important to discuss the role of FS members on the Full MFRC. **Julia A.** will resend the MOU with the FS

It would be helpful to have presentations at the full meeting and individual FRC meetings so members know what we can and can't do as we continue to collaborate with the FS. Maybe have a short 'role-play' at the MFRC meeting to give members an idea of potential problematic language or situations. **Julia R.** is invited to make a presentation at the next Lolo meeting and possibly provide some examples of language that could be problematic. Possibly Julia can speak at the Lincoln meeting as well.

•• Lolo FRC ••

The group is still meeting every other month and had a meeting in Feb. and will have the next meeting in April. The S. Fork of Fish decision is out and was distributed to the group.

There are also a number of members immersed in the FLRA proposal and has particularly engaged members of the EWG, since an FLRA project could have an impact on the work that could be done by the group in the Lolo. The proposal will be submitted to the regional office by May 1st so that it can get to DC by the 14th. Is it possible to have a SC letter of support sent to Leslie Weldon around May 1st? A formal request will come in a few weeks. A website is also being set up.

The WWG has been a part of a few public meeting in Missoula, which Bev Dupree and Jake Kreilick helped to organize. The meetings were meant to build support for the Marshall Woods project which is currently in prescoping. Also, the 9-mile project, Rennick Stark, is still in the beginning stages and the FS is gauging how the LRC would like to be involved in that project.

Membership continues to be good and diverse and the group is taking action on 2 new members.

•• Bitterroot FRC ••

At the last meeting, the group talked about lessons learned from the Butterfly project, reviewed the ground rules and clarified what they meant for certain issues. One item that needs further defined is the idea of "moving forward" because members have different ideas as to what that means. They also talked about the need to get on the ground as well as deferring any action on the 3 Saddles Project until they get a project on the ground.

There is concern that without a project since the 3 years the group has been meeting, many members are going to leave. But, part of the accomplishments the group should realize is that the EA and EIS from the summer were not challenged and there is a lot of work that goes on aside from just 'on the ground' action. But still, many members feel that there needs to be real management and need a reaffirmation of that. But, also it seems that the group has lost sight of the big picture and is getting caught up in the details. Access was the issue with the Butterfly project. At one point everyone was in agreement, but a formal vote never took place. From there it was decided that the project should be given back to the FS and some members felt that was a dead end resulting in 2 years of lost work.

Adam has a different recollection from Bill, which shows part of the problem right there. Adam remembers that there was a vote where it was decided to give the project back to the FS for analysis, which got pushed back and that caused issues.

Ginny did an exercise early on about why people are coming to the table and what they hope to get out of this process? Maybe that exercise should be revisited. It is also important to keep revisiting the principles, protocols and what it all means. There needs to be a point of give and take and being able to “live with” something as part of the collaborative process.

Even if the group cannot see the physical signs of success, there are successes. The Bitterroot NF thinks that committee is helping and there has been a culture shift in the area. There has also been a reduction in the amount of appeals and litigation, on the Bitterroot and Lolo, which coincides with the creation of the MFRC.

Marsha and **Julia** will meet with **Bill** and **Adam** to look over the notes from the first BRC meeting and the exercise.

•• **Helena FRC/Lincoln WG** ••

There was a meeting last week. The Lincoln Gulch and Stonewall projects were combined for scoping with an additional prescribed burn area added – so it is now a 3-part project.

This combined project consists of:

Lincoln project – about 1000 acres

Stonewall project – about 1200 acres

The 3rd part (prescribed fire) which the committee has supported – about 6000 acres

So about 2500 is restoration and 6000 prescribed fire.

The group is on record as supporting all 3 projects. There was strong support for the scoping and some clarifying comments so the group asked Amber to brief on the project status, address the comments, etc.

But, there were also some concerns with the project. The group was pushed to get this project moving and so they put in extra time to get it done. The group thought the process was going to start in Jan. but the notice to proceed was delayed for 3 ½ months. So, the committee drafted a letter that was delivered to Kevin with interest in moving forward with the project process and it seems that things have begun to move forward. Kevin called KD when he received the letter and Leslie got a copy of it as well.

Additionally, the group was struggling with mixed conifer/mixed severity fire regimes. There is a great deal of interest in the issue but the group wants to make sure that timing and capacity issues are dealt with as well as the monitoring component. So, possibly there is time to talk about these issues before getting on the ground and working on a project. The sense of the group is to keep moving forward and working through the concerns and issues – especially those surrounding some of the ambiguities with the science and monitoring around these issues. To some extent these issues have come up and been dealt with but the group was not endorsing entering into a mixed severity project and getting ahead of the working group or ahead of the overall mixed severity discussion.

At the Feb. meeting, Jim Burchfield talked about monitoring and the group is now drafting a letter to Jim to develop monitoring protocols and looking into the next field season. The group agrees that for restoration

projects across the board, an upfront monitoring agreement with specifics must be reached before there are any mixed severity projects. In terms of the Agency, there is a monitoring requirement and funding in the FLRA, but it is unknown whether the Record of Decision or Decision Notice will specifically address monitoring. Adam has worked on projects where monitoring was a part of the ROD, but that has not been across the board.

Mike Grimes is not longer on the Lincoln WG and there has been discussion of John Baucus or his son as a replacement. The group plans to approach his son.

•• **MFRC May Agenda** ••

The draft agenda is done.

Where's the Logs – commercial discussion, committee interactions, but could also roll into other points. But, don't want it become a "beat up on the FS" discussion. **Gordy** will change the title.

Education forum – Wildlands CPR has a study out for peer review on the wildlife use rates on closed roads vs. recontoured roads. But, if we did that, the panel should have balance.

That is a built-in time slot and we are looking for ideas.

Connectivity and climate change?

Biomass utilization?

Beetle?

Comments - District Ranger talks about working with the group and what that has meant – maybe from each of the RCs?

•• **MFRC Support Letters & Other** ••

Support letter for the Legacy Roads Trails Initiative. Is that something that the MFRC could support and sign-on? It would be ok to have an information letter, but there are concerns about wording and potential conflicts of interest. Adam can try to draft something for consideration – making sure to send to Steve to make sure the wording is general enough, as well as to the group.

Leslie brought up the idea of an MFRC DVD which could be filmed in the summer and could help the committees as well as used internally within the Agency and could help other collaboratives. Something similar to the Clearwater Stewardship video? Possibility that the NFF could provide funding.

•• **ACTION ITEMS** ••

Dale will follow up with Steve and organize a funding agreement meeting with Gordy, Julia, Steve, Bob and Marci.

Julia Riber will look into who is on the DC Science panel for the FS Planning Rule and forward that information to the SC.; present FACA scenarios at the MFRC meeting (?), Lolo mtg. (?) and Lincoln meeting (?).

Julia A. will send out the MOU with the FS.

Marsha, Julia A., Bill and Adam will look at the 1st BRC meeting notes and discuss revisiting the exercise that Ginny did with the group.

Gordy will change the title of "where's the logs" on the MFRC Draft Agenda.