

# Custer-Gallatin Working Group (CGWG)

**4th Quarter Meeting MINUTES**

**December 14th, 2022**

CGWG meeting opened at 1:30 pm in Bozeman at the Gallatin County Courthouse with in person attendance and virtual attendance via Zoom. Those present were:

John Prinkki, Chairman  
Steve Caldwell, Vice-Chairman  
Bill Wallace  
Jeff Schmidt  
Sean Steinebach  
Hillary Eisen  
Joe Josephson  
Scott MacFarlane  
Colin Cooney

Steve Kimball, DNRC  
Mary Erickson, USFS  
John Durnal, Sen Daines' Office  
Garth Neuffer BCPOA  
Richard Lyon  
Earl Atwood, BRCD

## **Consent Agenda (Minutes and Financial report/disbursements)**

Quorum not met, therefore the members deferred action on minutes and financial approval to next meeting in March, 2023.

## **Membership**

Chairman Prinkki reviewed vacancies in the roster, which noted upcoming retirements of Commissioners Joe Skinner (Gallatin Co.), Steve Caldwell (Park Co.), and the earlier resignation of Commissioner Jim Hart (Madison Co.), as well as the need for representatives for Agriculture, Hunting, and one At Large seat. John solicited input from members regarding new appointments and will be working on this issue in the coming weeks. He also reminded members that we will need to elect leadership Chair and Vice Chair positions at the March 2023 meeting.

## **Custer Gallatin National Forest – Supervisor/Staff report**

Mary Erickson provided an update highlighting recent activities and status of key projects engaged by the CGWG, as well as some staffing updates. There are a number of funding opportunities for projects due to recent bills passed in Congress, emphasizing high priority landscapes for accelerated action. Custer Gallatin Forest has one of the high priority projects in Montana (Bozeman Watershed), with another in NW Montana. Two projects have recently closed comment periods on draft decisions (So. Otter, So. Plateau). Final decision on So. Otter expected sometime in January, with So. Plateau decision coming somewhat later due to its comparative complexity. A number of statewide meetings are coming up related to Cross-boundary efforts with external partners to discuss and resolve project priorities. Responding to a question about staffing, she reported that Jason Brey will be returning to CGNF as District Ranger

for West Yellowstone, and they anticipate filling a new position for partnership planning and coordination.

**Cooke City, East Gallatin and South Otter Creek, projects**

Cooke City – Steve Caldwell reported status quo on the project as they wait for opportunities to conduct field visits and confirmed scoping. As Steve will be leaving his position as Commissioner he recommended Hilary Eisen to replace him as subcommittee Chair, which was agreed. John Prinkki asked to join the subcommittee as well.

No report on East Gallatin.

John Prinkki reviewed status on So Otter, suggesting that CGWG submit comments based on its past field visit even though the comment period has expired. He commented on community outreach on the project, and suggested a closer look at methods for improving public dialog both by the Forest team and by CGWG.

**Bridger Mountain infrastructure development plan:**

Hilary Eisen reported for the subcommittee which included a variety of local interests in addition to CGWG members, headed by Joe Skinner. Numerous meeting have been conducted in past months, resulting in a focus on three areas: 1) Outreach, Education and Signage, 2) new trail development and improvement of existing trails emphasizing multiple use systems, and 3) funding for road improvements in response to high traffic demand in certain areas e.g. creation of turning lanes, etc.

**Red Lodge Mountain Fuels Reduction Project**

Jeff Schmidt reported meetings have been held in Red Lodge monthly since April including local community groups and the Red Lodge District staff. An open house is being planned for Feb, 2023 to broaden public awareness, and they are working on an op-ed piece for the local paper.

**East Boulder; Sibanye Stillwater project**

No report

**Montana DNRC Local Government Liaison/American Forest Resource Council**

Steve Kimball reported the DNRC is very involved right now with organizational growth planning, largely in response to additional resources coming available to address its project demands, and opportunities to do more cooperative engagement on cross-boundary efforts, local govt support and grant administration related to additional funding they have received. DNRC now has contracted with retired Forest Service Cadre personnel whom are available to assist collaboratives with their processes. State Forester position is still vacant, recruitment likely to be finalized after the coming legislative session. Sean Thomas is acting as interim. Currently working with MFCN to coordinate the facilitation of the various working groups across the state and establish a stronger 'network of peers'. Meeting to work on this in January in Missoula which John Prinkki will attend. MFAC implementation is going strong, managing a new set of grants. Announcement of grants from this round should be out in the coming week or two. Forest Action grant program is expected to double or triple in the next year or two. MFCN Grant round is also

underway, with selections expected in early January. USFS Region 1 just transferred additional \$65K to assist with the coordination efforts. Litigation update – AFRC is monitoring active cases. No official change to report as of today, however it appears the BMW-No Hebgen-No Bridger case will be closed by the court very soon, leaving the open case on the Forest Plan Revision. GRLA project has a hearing on January 4th in Missoula, DNRC will report on that when it happens.

### **Montana Forest Collaborative Network**

John Prinkki attended the round table in Missoula in November. Well attended, with a presentation by the Chief of the Forest Service. If anyone is interested in the dialog from that meeting, recordings are available on the MFCN web site. At that meeting the Forest Chief discussed new NEPA streamline authorities which may help accelerate action on critical projects.

### **Other business**

Discussion of media strategy, including improving our capacity to have local/regional papers publish commentary and encouraging public involvement, and whether we should invest more effort in web site ( CGWG.org ) development or possibly create new content through facebook. Consensus was not to take on Facebook, and continue our present web site as a general resource for basic CGWG information, meeting info, etc.

**Next meeting – March 8, 2023 in Bozeman.**