

Custer-Gallatin Working Group (CGG)
Meeting Minutes; September 8th, 2021
Virtual meeting via Zoom

Welcome, introductions, agenda review, attendance

John Prinkki opened the meeting at 2:00 pm. The following members and attendees were on-line for the meeting:

John Prinkki	Kathy Minor
Bill Bullock	Nancy Schulz
Bill Wallace	Kristin DeWaay (Sen Daines)
Jim Hart	Richard Lyon
Steve Caldwell	Mike Thom
Sean Steinebach	Corey Lewellan
Jeff Schmidt	Maddy Munson
Barb Cestero	Mary Erickson
Darcie Warden	Ryan Cruz
Joe Skinner	Stephen Kimball
Colin Cooney	Sara Ghafouri (AFRC)
Kerry White	
Jackie Walden	

No additions or changes to the agenda.

Consent Agenda: Past Minutes and Financial report/disbursements approval

Previous meeting minutes (with two corrections) and current financial report were moved for approval by Steve Caldwell, second Barb Cestero. Approved
John Prinkki discussed the financial report regarding two grants that we are working on closing out. He also asked members for their thoughts on returning to in-person meetings. It was decided that the December meeting would be held in Bozeman at the County Courthouse, with virtual option for anyone who may not be able to travel. Jeff Schmidt requested that all members be reminded that for any in-person event, members will be expected to honor any Covid protocols in place at the chosen venue.

Membership applications and cancellations.

Sean Steinebach, Sun Mountain Lumber

Member application for Sean Steinbach, succeeding Tony Colter as Timber representative, was presented. Approval moved by Bill Wallace, second Jim Hart. Approved. Welcome Sean!

Custer Gallatin National Forest updates:

Mary Erickson is just returning from her 5 month temporary assignment. In general, fires have been the first priority over the summer, which has impacted the schedule on several projects. The Forest Plan Decision is pending Biological Service opinion from Fish and Wildlife service, expected within the next month. Objection resolution is in process, and afterward a briefing will be given to the Chief's office on September 29th. Once a Record of Decision is issued there will be a 30 day notice of availability on the EIS. Mary expects all to be done in December. The Three-Mile near Ashland sale has been awarded (Nyland), and the Greater Red Lodge Area sale was awarded (RY Timber). Corey Lewellan provided updates on the Bozeman Municipal Watershed and N Bridger Projects (contracts let and work is ongoing). Mary concluded info on the North Hebgen project for Jason Brey. Forest Action Plan funds are being applied to assist with fuels reduction/thinning on the BMW project. Work is moving ahead various parts of the project. Also have awarded mechanical treatments to RY Timber. On North Bridger, work is moving ahead with quite of bit of treatment under way or completed. Mary provided an update for N Hebgen from Jason Brey - on three sales awarded and are scheduled to move forward this fall and into the winter. Road work has commenced on Hebgen Flats. Jason will reach out to CGWG NH Subcommittee when appropriate for a tour.

Committee reports for South Otter Creek, Cooke City and East Gallatin Projects and the status of Montana Forest Action Plan committee.

John Prinkki discussed plans he is working on for a field trip to view the South Otter project area during the late fall, hopefully with a report out at the next meeting in December. Jeff Schmidt provided an update on Red Lodge activities, first thanking the Group for the letter of support for the Red Lodge Mountain fuel reduction project. This is a cross boundary project with good cooperation between the FS, DNRC and landowners. Lots of treatment accomplished mechanically, however due to tough terrain and small diameter materials it is not economically viable without grant assistance. He noted that wildfire insurance is becoming impossible to get in other areas affected by fires and is bracing for the same effect in the Montana market. Bill Bullock added that the difference in treated areas is stark due to the great amount of understory fuels being removed. John then pointed out that protection around many important communications sites that serve the public and emergency response in the area has been improved dramatically. Mary Erickson also indicated the FS is evaluating two additional sales, mixed commercial logging and non-commercial removal that may be ready for decision in Spring or early Summer, 2022, totaling ~2500 acres. Kerry White on East Gallatin – preliminary meeting to review landscape held, some initial fieldwork underway, more details worked out over the winter months. Steve Caldwell on Cooke City project – work on the ground is anticipated in 2023-2024, with 2022 used for NEPA processes.

**Bridger Mountain infrastructure development plan:
Progress report**

Joe Skinner – the group, which includes CGWG members and community members, has met four times so far. They have engaged with Headwaters Economic Development to leverage their skills in measuring the utilization of trails and other recreational resources in the area. Once some numbers are available, further assessment to develop priorities for potential projects.

American Forest Resource Council (AFRC), DNRC in regards to the Cottonwood appeal on the BMW-NH-NB

Status of Cottonwood Environmental Legal Foundation filings

Sarah Ghafari/Steve Kimball – Since last meeting, a joint amici brief was filed with DNRC on the appeal, and City of Bozeman has done so as well. Plaintiffs then replied, and moved to strike the CGWG from the joint amicus brief challenging our standing and process used. Sarah explained the details of the arguments submitted, but believes the hearing on their objections may not be heard until oral arguments in the case (9th Circuit). It could be several months away.

Other business

The topic of significant boost in funding to the Forest Service posed within the Infrastructure bill in Congress was covered. Mary Erickson added some information on the types of projects that might be enabled with the additional funding. If the bill passes, this would be a good topic to place on a future agenda.

Kerry White reported the Citizens for Balanced Use did receive a grant award from the Motorized Trail Pass for maintenance on trails open for motorized use (\$74,600) which will be used in areas South of Bozeman to include weed control, signage, and trail maintenance beginning next Spring. Funds will be available over a three year period.

Next meeting

December 8th – in person at the Gallatin County Courthouse, with option for virtual using Zoom.