

Custer-Gallatin Working Group (CGWG)
Meeting MINUTES March 13, 2024
Red Lodge, Mt.

Open Meeting, Introductions, Consent Agenda (Minutes and Financial report/disbursements)

Prior to the meeting, a catered lunch by Bill Bullock. Thank you Bill!!

Meeting opened by Chairman Prinkki with introductions around the table and those connected virtually. Attendees:

John Prinkki	Jon Durnal, (Sen. Daines)
Sally Schrank	Earl Atwood, BRCD
Stephen Kimball	Kathy Minor, USFS
Dan Allhands	Erin Steva, GYC
Jeff Schmidt	Amy Haas, USFS
Bill Wallace	Corey Lewellan, USFS
Bill Bullock	Nick Horn, Sun Mtn. Lumber
Scott MacFarlane	Will Banfield (UM student)
Jackie Walden	Melinda _____ (Winter Wildlands Alliance)
Mike Story	Josh Fairchilds, SW Montana Mountain Bikers Assoc.
Randy Weimer	

Consent agenda items were reviewed and approved on motion by Bill Wallace/Bill Bullock.

Election of Chair for 2024: On motion from Jeff Schmidt, seconded by Bill Wallace, John Prinkki was nominated to continue as CGWG Chairman for calendar year 2024. APPROVED

Membership Applications and Vacancies.

John Prinkki reviewed current vacant member seats, and ongoing work to recruit representatives. The Group discussed the potential for identifying new members that may have agency to represent more than one interest, which may lead to consideration of consolidation of two or more interest into one seat (to be discussed further at future meeting, as revision to the CGWG Operations Manual may be needed.) Regarding succession of representatives within each member organizations can be handled prospectively by notification from the member organization that a new representative has been designated, and not require a formal application/voted approval when there is turnover.

Custer Gallatin National Forest

Updates on Forest Plan and projects with CGWG involvement: East Boulder Mine Expansion, Cooke City, East Gallatin, , Red Lodge Mountain, and Bridger Infrastructure projects

CGNF staff provided updates on several ongoing projects. DR Cory Lewellan reported on status and recent changes in the Gallatin River East project broadening the scale to include priorities identified in the Chiefs new Wildfire Crisis Strategy. Late Spring to early Summer 2024 will see the project ramping up. It will take a year or two to bring the project to final decision.

Acting Supv. Minor provided updates on Cooke City project, indicating they have been working on getting the inter-disciplinary teams formed, along with NEPA team. Summer 2024 will be utilized for field work. Final decision is planned for 2025. DR Amy Haas reported status on the Red Lodge Mountain Fuel Reduction project, indicating a decision will be ready this fall with expectation of commercial work to begin in 2025. GRLA project has been halted due to litigation, but is expected to be resumed under a redeveloped plan in 2025. Bridger Infrastructure project update given by Commissioner MacFarlane (Gallatin Co. Jackie Walden reported South Otter project in the Ashland District. which includes eight sub projects over the next six years affecting 11,000 to 18,000 acres utilizing controlled burn, commercial harvest. Not all of the NEPA work has been done; each sub-project will see the NEPA analysis completed as the project goes along. Also, the Wild Turkey Federation has committed to provide assistance by subsidizing timber harvests to make the project financially viable for the local sawmills to stay open, as the project is important for wild turkey habitat in the area.

Montana DNRC Local Government Liaison.
Steve Kimball - DNRC project Updates

Steve Kimball: DNRC is working on internal realignment of its Divisions to better support activities related to implementing the Montana Forest Action Plan, as well as funding opportunities for cross-boundary work in the State. Last year there was an additional \$30 million approved to boost progress on landscape scale work. He reviewed funding opportunities via grants to collaboratives for meeting support, physical projects, and litigation. The MFCN workshop will be coming up in April in Helena. Steve announced he will be retiring from DNRC in May, and will be taking a new role as MFCN coordinator, succeeding Tim Love. John reported to the Group that CGWG has received a grant from the Watershed Council funding our operations for 2025. Steve provided clarification on who qualifies for assistance with cross-boundary projects, and how collaboratives might be involved as a driver for projects that involve a combination of private landowners, federal or state agencies, and local government participation to facilitate Montana Forest Action Plan priorities.

Other business and closing.

Randy Weimer gave an update to the Group on the Sibanye East Boulder Mine Expansion application, which CGWG previously endorsed. We reviewed the draft EIS, toured the site. During the comment period over 700 comments were received on the Draft EIS, roughly 90 percent of the comments were in support of the project. No objections were received to the record of decision. Final decision is expected later this year. This project will allow the mine's continued operation for the next 20 years or so.

John reminded the members we have vacancies to fill, and to review the provisions of our Operations Manual as these will be up for discussion at the next meeting. Josh Fairchilds, SWMBA suggested the possibility of having the current seat shared by the Winter Wildlands Alliance and the SWMBA converted into a full seat for each organization. If the Group is interested in doing that, he would need to take the matter up with his board for approval. John Prinkki asked the Group to consider for further action at upcoming meeting.