

Custer-Gallatin Working Group (CGWG) Meeting Minutes; Wednesday, December 8, 2021

Chairman John Prinkki convened the meeting at 1:30 pm. Members and guests in attendance (in person and virtually via Zoom):

John Prinkki	Steve Kimball=, DNRC
Joe Skinner	Jason Brey, USFS
Hillary Eisen	Tim Love, MFRC
Jackie Walden	Mary Erickson, USFS
Colin Cooney	Corey Lewellan, USFS
Sean Steinebach	Scott Shuster, USFS
Ed Joiner	John Durnal (Sen. Daines)
Steve Caldwell	
Randy Weimer	
Darcie Warden	
Jeff Schmidt	
Bill Wallace	

Members and guests were introduced. Consent agenda was moved for approval, motion Bullock/Eisen. Approved

There were no membership applications. John Prinkki advised the members that **Jim Hart**, Madison County Commissioner has resigned and accordingly has signaled the CGWG should consider his replacement. John advised he will be in touch with Jim and Madison Co. to explore options for his replacement.

Custer Gallatin National Forest Updates were on Forest Plan and projects with CGWG involvement: Scott Shuster, (USFS, Billings Office) joined via zoom to provide and update on potential impact to the FS from the Infrastructure Bill (IB) recently passed. Community protection will be the emphasis for fuels reduction funds allocated from the IB under the concept of 'firesheds'. The idea promoted is a 10 year action plan to treat the top 25% of severely threatened areas, which is expected to reduce wildfire risks for 75% of most threatened communities. Approved IB funds can be used to augment funding for existing or planned landscape scale projects that fall within a priority fireshed, e.g. Cooke City or Gallatin River East projects. Mary Erickson added that the FS sees the IB as an opportunity to increase its capacity to address landscape scale treatments. Mary further addressed questions about their expectations regarding ability to find additional staff, regional private section capacity, and other considerations for selection and timing of new projects. Steve Kimball (DNRC) addressed those questions also from the State perspective on IB. It is early in the process, with more details expected within the next couple of months related to process, criteria, etc. Mary also answered a couple of questions related to hiring process and pay levels prospectively. She is hopeful that

some streamlining on the hiring processes will occur, and it is not yet clear whether/where pay improvements might occur that will bolster their ability to hire.

Jackie Walden asked about status of CWPPs in the counties. Steve Kimball addressed that for DNRC, indicating there will be about \$250K available in 2022 for assisting counties with updating their plans, and will also be developing local strategic planning efforts that address cross-boundary issues. On the **Forest Plan**, Mary E. reported the FS is still on nearing finalization with the Fish and Wildlife Service, expecting the 2nd or 3rd week of Jan-2022 to issue the final decision.

Montana Forest Action Plan Project and report Red Lodge Mountain: Jeff Schmidt reported on the GRLA litigation, anticipating the RL ski area will likely join the suit. He also reported on the econ development bill with Sen Daines that would direct some of the fees paid by ski areas to specific projects in/around ski areas rather than going to the general fund. For MFAC, Jeff indicated that 14 projects were awarded, 3 of which are underway. The MFAC money expires in 2023, however the funds are for implementation only and not eligible for planning. Steve Kimball said the IB funding could be used for planning which may help accelerate some projects.

Committee reports for South Otter Creek, Cooke City and East Gallatin: John submitted a report on the South Otter field trip with DR Ron Hecker in November. Nothing new on the Cooke City project, other than expecting the regional strike team to take up the project in January. No report on the East Gallatin.

Bridger Mountain infrastructure development plan: Joe Skinner reported that the subcommittee has been meeting regularly, they have added several members from the community and have really good people on the group. Currently in a data gathering mode focused on identifying specific problems to be addressed.

American Forest Resource Council (AFRC), DNRC in regards to the **Cottonwood appeal** on the BMW-NH-NB: District Court decision in favor of FS was appealed to 9th Circuit Court, with arguments scheduled for Feb 11, 2022. Work is proceeding well on the NB and BMW projects. Jason Brey added updates on three sales on the NH project.

Tim Love, MFCN reminded members that their website has content on recent MFAC and other meetings, issue papers and other work products, and gave an update upcoming events.

Next Meeting – March 9, 2022