

Custer-Gallatin National Forests Working Group
Madison, Gallatin, Park, Sweet Grass, Stillwater and Carbon Counties
C/O Beartooth Resource Conservation and Development
P.O. Box 180
Joliet, Montana 59041

Meeting Minutes

July 9, 2014 – 1:00 PM

Gallatin County Detention Center, Bozeman, Montana

An organizational meeting of the Custer-Gallatin Working Group was led by John Prinkki, Carbon County Commissioner. Attendees present:

John Prinkki	Carbon County
Jim Hart	Madison County
Marty Malone	Park County
Bill Wallace	Sweet Grass County
Pierre Martineau	Gallatin County
Steve White	Gallatin County
Joe Skinner	Gallatin County
Dan Clark	MSU Local Govt. Center
Bree Dugan	Sen Walsh's Office
Natalie Storey	Livingston Enterprise
Traute Parrie	USFS
Earl Atwood	Beartooth RC&D

Commissioner Jerry Dell from Stillwater County could not attend this meeting.

First order of business was the adoption of the draft Working Group Operations manual. Bill Wallace placed a motion to adopt the current version of the operations manual for further Working Group activities, seconded by Jim Hart. The motion passed on unanimous voice vote.

Under the guidelines provided in the Working Group Operations Manual the group will be led by a participating County Commissioner . Marty Malone nominated Commissioner John Prinkki as Chair of the working group, seconded by Jim Hart. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

Under the guidelines provided in the Working Group Operations Manual, a Vice-Chair will be elected from the membership of the group. Commissioner Jim Hart was nominated for Vice-Chair by Bill Wallace, seconded by Joe Skinner. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

Chairman Prinkki advised the group that all six County Commissions participating have indicated that approval of the inter-local agreement is either in place or pending. Once all signed agreements are in place he will reconstitute the agreement with one signature page as the founding instrument for the Working Group.

Discussion:

For purposes of facilitation and obtaining clarity on the CGWG mission, a question was placed on the table for each member to respond: “What problems are we trying to solve?”

Responses from Commissioners:

The Forest Service is frequently stalled by litigation and opposition to projects identified in its forest plan. While those issues are being settled, nothing is getting done, and we continue to have big fires.

Consensus that exists on priorities are not expressed in a way or at a time that is helpful.

There are a lot of projects that can be done without significant opposition, we need to bring more focus on the achievable.

The Forest Service is unfairly perceived as doing a poor job, which can be addressed through better public education about their mission and processes.

It needs to be pointed out that fighting fires is so much more expensive than fuel reduction activities.

The loss of PILT funding combined with no logging is having a huge (negative) economic impact.

De-commissioning roadways has become an issue. Road maintenance on thru-ways that started off as logging access, then recreation access have had decreasing priorities over time, and gradually have become a burden to county budgets. We need to log more, BUT in areas that make sense. Return to the roaded areas with merchantable timber.

The Forest Service often gets negative input during the objection process, but seldom positive or supportive statements which can provide balance in the perspective and perceptions taken under consideration by courts during litigation. They need ‘friendly’ interveners.

Discussion turned to the Forest Service role in the context of the Working Group. Parrie Traute (USFS) explained that the Forest Service would act on request as facilitator for information and education on projects, providing technical information pertaining to forest management, planning cycles, and available resources to insure the Working Group has accurate and timely information to assist with its mission.

Further exploring the Working Group mission and relationship with the Forest Service, the question was asked of the Commissioners present: “What is the intersection between County Government and the activities and mission of the Forest Service?”

After discussion the consensus answer was “alignment with Forest Service objectives where they contribute to public safety, health and general welfare of the counties, which is the primary mission of each Commission.”

Chairman Prinkki turned the discussion to next steps, and invited suggestions as to goals for the next meeting. The group agreed that emphasis needs to be placed now on broadening the representation at

the table to include objective voices to represent the various interests identified in the Operations Manual. It was agreed that prior to the August 13 meeting, the group would collectively create a list of contacts to invite as participants in future meetings, first to simply broaden awareness of the CGWG mission, but eventually to identify representatives for various interests that are willing to become enrolled (voting) members of the CGWG through the nomination and acceptance process. The draft list that is generated will be sent back to everyone prior to the August meeting for additional review, and final vetting at the meeting.

Earl Atwood agreed to do further work with Chairman Prinkki on the Operations Manual language, to incorporate phrasing that emphasizes the County Commissioners' motive in creating the group.

With additional membership anticipated by the September meeting, the group asked Traute Parrie to assist in planning an educational presentation in September focusing on the Forest Service planning cycle, to better orient the group toward evaluation of projects that will be identified for 2015 and beyond.

Dan Carter made a final point and recommendation to the group. He asked that we contemplate how this group is different from other groups out there, to define its value. He suggested one measure of the value would be in brokering relationships among people (interests) that need opportunities to agree.

Chairman Prinkki thanked everyone in attendance, adjourning the meeting at 3:15 pm.