

**Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group (BDWG)
Meeting Record**

3:00 – 5:00 PM, Wednesday, September 2, 2020
On Zoom

MEETING SUMMARY

Attendance

Members: Tony Colter, timber representative; Maureen Connor, citizen-at-large; Chris Edgington, fishing representative; Nick Gevock, wildlife representative; Tom Harrington, motorized recreation representative; Karen Laitala, quiet recreation and weeds representative; Chris Marchion, hunting representative; Commissioner Tom Rice, Beaverhead County; Darcie Warden, conservation representative; Commissioner Leonard Wortman, Jefferson County

Technical advisors: Alex Dunn, Cyd Janssen, Dale Olson, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest (BDNF); Steve Kimball, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)

Facilitators: Ben Irely and Travis Anklam, National Forest Foundation (NFF)

Guests: Pedro Marques, Big Hole Watershed Committee

Decisions

August meeting record approved with one amendment.

Action Items

- Dale Olson will share a list of Joint Chiefs' projects with background on why certain projects were prioritized, to help members understand what type of projects might be better supported.
- Ben Irely & Travis Anklam will inform Dale Olson on future committee meetings and opportunities to connect with committee work.
- Ben Irely & Travis Anklam will help initiate and organize meetings for all BDWG committees before the next BDWG meeting.
- Tony Colter & Darcie Warden will initiate and organize a strategy session on the BDWG, COVID, progress over the last year, and efforts going forward.
- Ben Irely will send out the Big Hole Landscape Vision document for members to review and comment.
- Ben Irely will share the Big Hole Landscape Vision document with Alex Dunn, who will solicit feedback from other BDNF staff.

Bin Items

- BDWG could provide BDNF with feedback on mentioned NEPA projects during upcoming comment period.
- BDWG will revisit the Big Hole Landscape Vision document once members and others have reviewed it and provided feedback.

MEETING RECORD

1. Welcome, introductions, approve meeting record

[Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group (BDWG) members reviewed and approve August meeting record.]

2. Updates from the Madison Ranger District

• **Projects Updates**

- The Greenhorn Project Environmental Assessment (EA) is being reviewed internally for the and will be opened for public comment soon. A decision is expected by December or early 2020.
- The Strawberry-Cascade Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is being reviewed internally and the draft will be ready for public comment this fall.
- The Clear Creek Aspen Project, which includes conifer reduction and prescribed fire, and the Ruby Moose Project, which involves cutting and burning, will be submitted for Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership (Joint Chiefs') funding this year.
- The Badger Creek Prescribed Burn Project, which includes about 2,100 acres of prescribed burn, and the Elk Lake Aspen project, which includes 730 acres of prescribed burn, will likely occur over the next two years.

- **Recreation** - Recreation has been extremely busy this year, in comparison with last year. Just six campgrounds on the district pulled in \$73,000 this year, which is an increase from last year.

- What has the total acres of prescribed burning on the BDNF been in the last year, and has prescribed burning been an issue with the public on the BDNF?

- Acres burned in prescribed fire can be made available and there have not been any issues reported by the public regarding prescribed fire this year.

3. BDNF updates

• **Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership application**

- The Joint Chiefs' is a program between the Chiefs of the USDA Forest Service (USFS) and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to identify and fund projects that meet the missions of both agencies. The BDNF is submitting an application to Joint Chiefs' for funding this year.
- A large number of partners are joining in to support the BDNF application.
- The BDNF funding proposal asks for a total of \$1,153,120, split between NRCS and BDNF. These funds would support several projects, including fuels treatments for NRCS and over 12,000 acres treated in the Greenhorns over the next several years.
- The application is due in early September.
- No letter of support is needed from BDWG for this application.
- The Nebraska National Forest used Joint Chiefs' funding to leverage Good Neighbor funding. That strategy could assist the BDNF.

• **BDNF projects proposed for Great American Outdoors Act funding**

- The Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA), recently signed into law, funds the Land and Water Conservation fund and provides funding for backlogged maintenance on public lands. National Forests can apply for funding made available through GAOA.
- BDNF is applying for funds and would prioritize projects in the first year that demonstrate change to the public.
- The BDNF proposal focuses on funding forest-wide projects, which would include: forest-wide road repair and maintenance, bridge maintenance (Big Hole and Maiden Rock bridges), trails and toilet maintenance, recreation and road signs, Delmo Lake road maintenance, forest-wide trail reconstruction, trail bridge design and replacement, and maintenance of campground infrastructure.
- 60% of funds would be allocated from national funds, while 40% would be regional.
- Is the list of proposed projects for just this year?
 - Yes- although BDNF will roll over projects to other years that are not completed this year and will make a new list each year.
- Could we get a more detailed list of the reasoning behind what projects are prioritized/funding? That list could help members and others understand what projects will be supported and are worth pursuing; it could also be an opportunity to engage the public.
 - Yes - BDNF will put that together and send it to BDWG.
- BDNF would like to get connected to BDWG committee work.
- **Fire Season update**
 - It has been a fairly regular fire season for the BDNF.
 - Several fires are active.
 - The Bear Creek fire (11,900 acres, 90% contained) recently transited back to type 4 team (district managed) and seems to be winding down.
 - The Old Baldy Fire (129 acres, 100% contained) just northeast of Sheridan received a lot of resources as it started early in the season, and was easier to manage.
 - The Potosi Fire outside of Pony is small and contained; locals reported it quickly which enabled quick containment.
 - The Bradley Creek Fire just north of Norris burned through BLM ground and is being managed by the state and county; collaboration between agencies helped with management.
 - The State Creek Fire is small, remote, and still burning north of the Whitetail reservoir
 - There seems to be more escaped campfires this year, potentially due to the higher number of folks recreating.
- **Status of NEPA projects**
 - The Tendoy Oil and Gas EA project has the BLM as lead- they are reviewing edits to the draft EIS, which will be released for public comment soon.
 - The Rancho Deluxe, Greenhorn EA, Pintler Face, and Fleecer projects are all awaiting programmatic lynx consultation. BDNF is working on the order of which project to release, with a decision to follow for each.

- The programmatic lynx consultation is done to understand if actions undergone in these projects will affect lynx. The process includes: consulting with the regional office, doing a Biological Assessment (BA)(submitted in 6-8 weeks to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and then the USFWS produces a Biological Opinion (BO)(in another 6-8 weeks). BDNF also used this opportunity to update habitat models. There is a tremendous workload around this consultation.
- The Pintler Face project is moving forward on planning; a contract bid will come soon.
- The Selway Saginaw Project is starting scoping next week. It is mostly a vegetation project.
- For the Selway Saginaw and Red Rocks projects, BDNF is using a combined scoping and comment period to streamline the process.
- BDNF would welcome comments from the BDWG on these projects.
- The East Pioneer received comments with some concerns stated, shared by the forest, about noxious weed spread. Data collection from a similar treatment elsewhere on the BDNF suggests a limited spread of noxious weeds from the conifer removal. This project will be implemented alongside BLM.

4. BDWG meetings and COVID concerns

- Members expressed that it is likely we will be in a similar situation with the pandemic and zoom, for the near future.
- There was a suggested that we have a small strategy session to discuss the BDWG and COVID going forward. This session could include revisiting what the Cadre shared with the BDWG last year, and the accomplishments we have made over the past year. Where do we want to go, moving forward? We could also involving USFS in this process.

5. Status of Montana Forest Action Plan

- Several members were on recent call for the draft Montana Forest Action Plan. They are expecting a release of the draft in October and a final release in November.
- The document is anticipated to be easy to read and accessible, largely thanks to involvement of BDWG members and others.

6. Big Hole Landscape Vision document

- A document outlining a landscape vision for the Big Hole Watershed.
- Members have not visited this document in a while; we will send it around for comment and revision and will revisit this on another day.

7. Public comment

No comments were made.

8. Member close-out questions and comments

- Marks Lumber is the Jefferson County business of the year.
- BDNF has hired a public information officer.

Meeting adjourned at 4:29