

**Beaverhead County Collaborative
Agenda
June 16, 2022
1:00pm-3:30
Whitehall and Zoom**

Attending:

Voting Members: Alec Underwood, Montana Wildlife Foundation, Jim Berkey, The Nature Conservancy, Tim Love, Montana Forest Collaborative Council, Aubrey Betram, Wild Montana (fill in for Emily Cleveland), Sean Steinback, Sun Mountain Lumber, Ken Walsh, HD71; Zach Owen, Beaverhead Conservation District; Tom Rice, Beaverhead County Commissioner; Colin Cooney, Trout Unlimited; Senator Jeff Wellborn; SD36

Advisors: Mike Durglo, CSKT; Tim Love, Montana Forest Collaboration Network

Guests: Cindy Perdue-Dolan, staff for Senator Daines; Gene Loder, Beaverhead Outdoors Club (became voting member after being elected)

Welcome and Introductions

Participants and guests introduced themselves.

Voting members who could not attend assigned voting members as proxy voters as follows:

Jeff Johnson: Byron Martinell, Parke Scott

Sen. Jeff Wellborn - Rep. Tom Welch

Colin Cooney: Scott Laird, Jack Kirkey

Cindy Perdue-Dolan, staffer for Senator Daines, was a guest. She gave the group an update, saying that Senator Daines supports bottom up collaborative approaches to resolving the WSA status on a permanent basis. Senator Daines is planning on bringing forward legislation.

Gene Loder, Beaverhead Outdoors Club, attended as a guest until a vote was taken.

Review and Updates

Notes from the May 19, 2022 meeting. No changes were made, though it was noted that keeping clear track of wilderness terminology is correct for a given piece of ground would be helpful.

Action: Barb Cesterro offered to help the group understand all the definitions for different wilderness administration and WSA designations.

Budget Update: There were no changes to the budget since last month. For voting members who are traveling on their own dime, a travel stipend of \$.50/mile is offered for meetings. Please

send your request to Zach Owen at the Beaverhead Conservation District (zach@beaverheadwatershed.org)

Public Engagement and Outreach Discussion

Participants discussed what they'd like to do to help inform the greater public and make the process more transparent.

- Posting meeting notes publicly would be helpful so interested members of the public could see them. BCC does not have a website.
 - Action: Zach Owen will check to see about posting them on the Beaverhead Conservation District website.
 - The request is to have notes and the member contact list on the site.
- Public Meeting for Hidden Pasture area: The **August 18** BCC meeting will be held in Dell. Jeff Johnson suggested the meeting room at Calf-A. If more space is needed, we'll need another venue.
 - Action: Jeff Johnson checks the space in Dell for August 18.
- Media stories and advertisements: These could be useful to help inform the public about the BCC process, collaboration, and information. The group thought they weren't ready yet to do this, but it will be useful later.
- Talking to interested participants: Group agreed that this is a good idea. The membership contact list will be updated and shared.
 - Action: Karen/Zach will update the list
- Public list: A list of those who have expressed interest in the BCC will be collected and agendas and zoom information will be sent to them.
 - Action: Karen will add emails to the public list that are recorded from sign-in sheets.
- A Facebook page for the BCC could be set up. It was requested that comments would be turned off and this be used to convey information, if the group decides it would be useful.
- Elevator Speech; The elevator speech is complete and available to BCC members
- FAQs: A list for members that helps answer common questions would be helpful.
 - Action: Karen/Colin will start an FAQ sheet that BCC members could add to
- Point of contact: For the most part, participants agreed that all members could talk with the public. If there is a need for a first contact, Karen Filipovich could handle it and pass onto the correct person or a point of contact could be assigned.
- Participants were reminded that all emails that go to public officials are subject to subpoenas, if that occurred, so BCC emails would apply.

Filling Quiet Recreation Seat

In May, participants worked on options for filling the quiet recreation seat, but a quorum was not present.

The group did not want to change the charter. They agreed that the best option was to have Gene Loder represent the citizen at large seat. Jack Kirkey is the current citizen at large, but

could also represent quiet recreation. He indicated that he was open to that option and sent his proxy to the June meeting.

The voting members unanimously voted to this set of changes. Gene Loder is now the citizen representative. Jack Kirkey now represents quiet recreation. All seats listed in the charter are now filled.

Discussion: Hidden Pasture Wilderness Study Area

Updates on information:

- Geology area information from the BLM was shared related to mining. It appears that hard rock potential is very low. Oil and gas are perhaps low to moderate, but there seem to be some questions on this.
 - Action: Colin Cooney will check with BLM/others to see about any other mining information.
- Sage Grouse Habitat Map: There is an administrative halt on surface disturbance, due to an administrative decision to protect sage grouse habitat that includes the Hidden Pasture area.
 - There was a question on how the sage grouse boundaries affect Forest Service management areas
 - There was interest in ensuring that this, like other issues, is in a legislative package, not managed through administrative rules.
- Cultural Resources: Mike Durglo said that CSKT is working on an updated first management plan. They also have a database of cultural sites.
 - Action: Mike Durglo shares relevant data for Hidden Pasture and area cultural sites and any further information on the forest planning.

The participants reviewed where they were in terms of approach and specific agreements.

- Intent is to keep land use/look and feel much like it is now. The values of agriculture, recreation, wildlife, culture and recreation are things this group would like to remain as *status quo*.
- Legislative Approach: Group wants:
 - WSA released
 - Designated management enshrined in legislation, rather than as an administrative change
- Cultural Resources:
 - ACEC applies to a significant portion of the area and that will continue
 - Want protection of cultural sites
 - Some interpretation is acceptable, but want to ensure preservation and protection best served by keeping specific site information quiet
 - Action: Follow-up with Mike Durglo on specifics that CSKT has on cultural resources

Minor Boundary Changes:

Agricultural Removal: further discussion on agricultural infrastructure removal brought up more questions. Jeff Johnson expressed concern that the current WSA boundary includes a private road and agricultural infrastructure. At the same time, he is in favor of preserving the land as an area for agricultural operations and wildlife. He would be in favor of having the area within a BCA, without boundary adjustment, as long as the current operations and infrastructure plan could be continued.

For the Sheep Creek Road area boundary change, discussion centered around whether BCA or removal and management under something like the underlying Appendix Q would be most appropriate. Barb Cesterro suggested that a change in boundary might be the easiest approach because the intent of BCA is to focus on special areas.

Action: Colin Cooney will check with BLM on any suggestions or input they have on how to do these.

Right of Way:

- Group will discuss more on ROW at the next meeting. One question might be how specific language might be written in a legislative approach, since the intent to keep ROW in character with current use is important.

Mining Discussion:

There are three major areas for mining:

- Hard rock minerals
- Oil and gas
- Materials like gravel, rock

The proposed minor boundary change would move the now closed quarry (closed due to safety concerns) outside a BCA. Hard rock minerals do not appear to be a factor in the area.

Oil and gas may have some potential in the area. This is the area where the group agreed more discussion is needed.

- Is there any further information on oil and gas potential in the area? The BLM document suggested a low to moderate potential. Colin Cooney stated that he had talked with a geologist, Dr. Robert Thomas, who thought oil and gas potential would be virtually non-existent.
- If that potential exists, what would be the potential for surface disruption on the surface of the land, both in Hidden Pasture and outside the boundaries?
- How would the previously proposed idea of allowing horizontal drilling beneath the Hidden Pasture or other surface disturbances for oil and gas affect area affect wildlife and agricultural range operations across the landscape?

- This is an area where participants are split on their preferences at this point. It was agreed that more information and further discussion would be helpful.

Action: All, read resources and reach out to expert contacts for more information on oil and gas potential and potential impacts to the existing use of Hidden Pasture and surrounding area.

Action: TU is willing to work on a map that shows mining potential and the boundaries of Hidden Pasture on one map

Discussion:

- Connectivity with the larger landscape was expressed as important in order to retain wildlife flows and ensure that agricultural operations are not fragmented.
- Need to review oil and gas resources and discuss options further
- Visual resources management is another area this group needs to address for management

The group was asked if they were generally in favor of the following for Hidden Pasture:

- Legislative approach that specifies both release of WSA and new management for area within a BCA
- Keeping uses and landscape similar to its current character and uses
- Cultural site protection that includes some interpretation, but no development or directions to cultural sites
- Minor boundary changes in conformance to the uses the group discussed in this meeting
- Right of way provisions that express the interest in keeping the Sheep Creek road area a conduit for road, power and fiber transit. Current roads would be kept open within Hidden Pasture and support for existing agricultural operations would be made
- Quarry would have the potential to be reopened if the closure issues can be addressed. Hard rock and bulk rock mining, aside from the quarry would not be a factor going forward.
- Oil and gas potential and management requires more discussion

The July 21 meeting will be focused on trying to resolve these final issues so that the draft idea could be brought to a public meeting in Dell on August 18.