

Beaverhead County Collaborative
Notes
February 16, 2023
1:00pm- 3:30pm
Borden's in Whitehall and Zoom

BCC Members Attending: Parke Scott, Jim Berkey, Jack Kirkey, Colin Cooney, Barb Cestero, Aubrey Bertram, Scott Laird, Zach Own, Byron Martinell, Parke Scott, Gene Loder

BCC Advisors Attending: Tim Love, MFCN; Katie Stevens, BLM; Amanda Lacey, BLM

Guests and Members of the Public: Stephen Kimball, Kerry White, Bill Hodges

Notes and Facilitation: Karen Filipovich

The notes were accepted unanimously. These will be posted on the Beaverhead Conservation District.

Jeff Johnson was proxy for Raylee Honeycutt, Ken Walsh, Tom Rice, Tom Welch and Jeff Wellborn. Scott Laird was proxy for Colin Cooney when he had to leave early.

The budget was unchanged.

The Montana Forest Collaboration Network is holding a conference for collaborative groups in Montana. Zach Owen, Beaverhead Conservation District, and Gene Loder, Citizen at Large. The group was asked to consider whether travel and any missed work could be covered. The group unanimously approved reimbursement for up to \$1,000 total.

The Montana Wildlife Federation is leaving the collaborative, due to staffing changes. The group was asked to reach out to people who understand the collaborative process, the area and are representatives of wildlife interests to fill the wildlife seat. Some suggestions included the Wild Sheep Foundation, Montana Wild Sheep Foundation, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers and the Anaconda Sportsman Group. BCC members were asked to talk with representatives from the groups and come back with suggestions.

Collaboration Discussion

The group reviewed the collaboration and emphasized that it is a process of working respectfully through differences to come up with compromises and solutions for the WSA and recommended wilderness areas.

Though each member represents a specific interest, they all work to see other perspectives. Additionally, several members stated that they did not agree that the group was unbalanced, as had been charged by outside members. Instead, they pointed to the balance between interests, as well as other factors such as the fact that few were conservationists and several were active motorized vehicle users. Ranchers talked about their interest in managing the land and pride in the Hidden Pasture agreement, which the group felt was a good set of management recommendations.

There was discussion that there is not a mining interest seat. The group did decide it was worth continuing to try to find someone who is an expert, but also acknowledged that the area has not been a high priority to the mining industry. The Executive Director of the Montana Mining Association has indicated that he would be able to come to a future meeting to give an overview of mining potential and interests in the area. There was also a request to follow up with BLM to see if they had any further mining information. Byron Martinell had a couple of leads on someone who is an expert in mining in the area.

There was also agreement that the group needs to talk about issues and respectfully disagree and then seek to find solutions.

Action: Byron will talk to those interested in mining and invite them if there is interest.

Action: Jim Berkey will follow up with BLM to see if they have some further mining information

Communication Plan

The leadership team recommended that another article on progress with the Montana Standard would be useful. They also recommended that talking points be developed to help all members have a quick guide to help with discussion. Finally, more information shared with Commissioners with questions would be helpful.

Hidden Pasture Update

The BCC members looked at the current language in the Hidden Pasture language. The goal is to be clear, but it was decided that no formal legislative language or an extremely detailed survey of the boundary or legal description was needed.

Action: The subcommittee was directed to review the language around the setbacks and minor boundary changes that would form the recommended Backcountry Area. It was also charged with looking at the entire document to make sure the language was clear and reflected the vote the group made in January.

Bell Lime Kiln Discussion

The Bell Lime Kiln Wilderness Study area is within the BLM land management.

Katie Stevens, BLM, outlined the administrative and Congressional land management options that are all in the BLM Tool kit.

The Backcountry Area (BCA) is a newer designation that allows for uses that don't conflict with wildlife. These are semi-primitive, but can allow motorized travel on designated routes. Activities like oil and gas are not clearly prescribed as in a WSA area and offers flexibility in management. There is always some level of management on BLM land, so using those tools is about matching management plans to the goals.

Access was also discussed. There has been a reduction in access to the area, due to changes in private land ownership in the last dozen or so years. This issue is outside the purview of the charge of this group.

This would be useful to have more information about mining history and any oil and gas potential, so the group has a better idea of any potential or foreseeable development

There is a private inholding with a road within the boundaries. That access needs to be preserved in any management scenario.

Jack Kirkey shared pictures and information from an earlier visit. There is a lot of sagebrush lower down and in exposed areas. There are extensive Douglas Fir in the draws. There are bears and moose sign in the area, with moose looking to use Montana Mahogany. It is a dry area, but has some wildlife values.

There is a grazing allotment on the Lime Kiln side that Luke Peters described in the previous meeting. There are also allotments on the Bell side.

Biological survey information would be useful to evaluate any wildlife and fisheries potential.

Action: Scott Laird will follow up with FWP to bring someone in with wildlife expertise. He will also follow-up with BLM to see if they can come in person.

Action: Byron Martinell is following up to see if his contacts with mining and historic information can come to share information.

Action: Aubrey Bertram will bring a summary of the legal information around the WSA.

Action: Barb focused on BLM maps and habitat information

Action: All: looking for information on habitat, cultural importance, economic impacts of motorized use and any change.

Questions, Concerns and any Public Comment

There were no questions or concerns raised.

There was one public comment from Kerry White, Citizens for Balance Use. He is interested in the process in the Beaverhead. He was born in the Gallatin Valley and has ranching in his background. As a legislator, he has worked on many natural resources issues. He is concerned about quick access to areas because of fire and is interested in seeing motorized use for a variety of users. He did express that he'd be interested in being on the Beaverhead County Collaborative, and he has reservations on whether the membership is balanced between interests. He did want to see more mining interest represented and liked the idea of MMA or an expert from Montana Tech. He has been a long-time member of the Custer-Gallatin Working group. He thought it would be worthwhile for the group to look at the BLM Natural Conservation Area as an option as well.

Adjourn

Next Meeting: March 16, 1-3:30