

Beaverhead County Collaborative

Agenda

August 17, 2023

1:00 pm-3:30

Whitehall and Zoom

BCC Members Attending: Tom Rice, Beaverhead County Commission; Jeff Wellborn, SD 36; Ken Walsh, HD 71; Gene Loder, citizen representative; Zach Owen, Beaverhead CD; Byron Martinell, Landowner; Colin Cooney, Trout Unlimited; Craig Blubaugh, Sun Mountain Lumber; Parke Scott, motorized recreation, Jack Kirkley, quiet recreational Jack Atcheson, Jr., Montana Wild Sheep Foundation

BCC Advisors Attending:

Public and Guests Attending:

Notes: Karen Filipovich

Review and Updates

- Notes from May 19, 2022 meeting and Tour Summary
- Budget Update
 - Travel stipend - track mileage

Have significant funds to disburse and have about \$4,500 in the bank with more to come. Most of it has been used for facilitation and renting the room so far.

- Wildlife Seat Filled - Jack Atcheson, Jr., Montana Wild Sheep Foundation. Vote was unanimous by email
- Tour Summary. Accepted with the following changes from draft:
 - Spelling Jack Atcheson, Jr. correctly
 - Homestead inholding was the Peterson family
- Upcoming events and announcements
 - September 14 - Tour of Italian Peaks and Garfield Peak. This will be an overview.
 - All BCC: Landowners Suggestions. There is interest in ensuring that adjacent landowners can come on the tour. BCC members suggested Ross Hanson, Bill Martinell, Beullers, Mike Marsh, and others
 - Gene Loder, Byron Martinell and Jeff Wellborn knew Snowline contacts. Snowline - Wes Miner and Lloyd Carlson
 - Parke Scott and Coline Cooney identified USFS staff - Alex Dunn - USFS NEPA coordinator, others. Colin will contact USFS to invite them to tour.

- Colin Cooney - contact Chris Edgington and Roger Peters.
- [High Divide Event](#): September 18. The High Divide Collaborative. Continental Divide area - pretty big landscape that is intact, They look at the field tour and are teaming up with the Beaverhead Deer Lodge Working Group. Basin Creek water treatment for drinking water. Worried about erosion from wildfire. Sean is doing a lot of thinning and sediment in case of a fire - protection of the water source - reduce sediment and thin woods to protect that water. High Divide Collaborative will cover lunch, but probably not the brewing company beer.
 - Zach and Colin will give an update at the event about the Beaverhead County Collaborative
 - Trying to get press and Congressional staffers to come
 - [Montana Tech Mining and Mineral Symposium](#) is September 27-30
- Forest Service Resource Advisory Council Member Openings: \$12 million or so is getting distributed to Forest Service projects. Need at least 15 members to represent members. 1x, 1-2 days per year. OHV use is a category. The group ranks the applications for all the projects. As a member of the committee, you can apply for a project even if you are on the committee. Also need citizens, people in regional nonprofits, elected officials and

Bell Lime Kiln Discussion

July Tour Recap. These characteristics were noted in the meeting. More details are in the notes.

The area is characterized by open spaces. It is a diverse landscape with limestone and geographic features. It is possible to drive to the heart of the area and along the ridges. These are open, designated roads.

There are inholdings, current range permittees and past history of homesteading. There is a subdivision right below Bell Lime Kiln and roaded access points from several directions. Roads tend to be minimal, with 4 wheel high clearance or OHV needed to drive them. Within the Tendoy more generally, there are seasonal road closures.

There were known tipi rings right outside the boundary and likely other cultural artifacts within the boundaries.

The boundaries themselves were not drawn to match any geographic features and often cut across the hillsides. Concern was expressed for timber management and fire.

There is both commercial timber potential and beetle activity and conifer encroachment.

There is a past history of mining.

Participants saw elk, sage grouse and a black bear. Sage in the area is good for Big Horn.

BLM did mention that a change in status could affect the amount of management time this area took.

The number and condition of the roads cut against being untrammelled by man, in the Wilderness Act. It wasn't as clear whether it is similar enough to Hidden Pasture to merit a Backcountry Conservation Area or some other type of management.

Much of the quasi-primitive nature seems to be linked to private access closures and difficulty in access.

Water is scarce in the region. It isn't easy to access for horse-based recreation. Hunting appears to be the highest visitation area.

Craig Blublaugh, Sun Mountain Lumber, completed some more analysis of the timber resources in Bell Lime Kiln.

He noted that since it is public land, BLM is the manager, but he applied his expertise in evaluating forest health to make an assessment.

He said that there is about 3,300 acres of forested land within the boundaries. He identified about 1,200 acres or about 12% of the landbase for possible forest treatment. These would be possible to reach with roads or in some cases by reaching in from outside the WSA boundaries.

Stands show combinations of conifer encroachment, spruce budworm, and changes in stands. Seeing some spruce budworm. In many dense stands, there are rounded tops to trees which is an indication of lack of vigor, either through beetle infestation or limited ability to spread roots. There is growth on talus slopes with regeneration. It is almost all douglas fir with a little limber pine and juniper. He did see some old growth and fire scars. There are old hand cut stumps in some areas, as well as a lot of fencing, including some that had grown into the trees.

Boundaries of the WSA cut through hillsides of forest in many cases, so if an area was treated, it would need to be done both inside and outside the WSA boundary if it were effective.

In several areas, there is commercial value and options for roads that could be built or modified to accommodate operations. This would be about 60% of total volume harvested, so would be thinning. He estimated that it would be possible to harvest about 5.4 million board feet, with about 4.7 million board feet in logs with tractor access. If additional line technique was used, that number would rise. There are issues with road access and high road building costs and private owner access would be needed in some places.

Overall, the bottom line is that there are stands that are overly dense as well as beetle kill. As a forest professional, he would like to see this area managed more and believes that another management type would make that easier to accomplish.

Discussion on Decision Matrix:

In the first Wilderness Study Area, the group identified a number of factors that go into management recommendations and fit with different criteria. Wilderness is the most restrictive and BLM has a number of management areas that vary from quite constrained to unfettered. When the Hidden Pasture recommendation agreements were made, the group broke down its recommendations to match those different management considerations.

BCC members started working through those recommendations. The summary of this discussion will be reflected in the working decision matrix for Bell Lime Kiln.

Overall Landscape Management:

Wilderness Study Area, but BLM has recommended that it be released from wilderness status. There is a summary of their recommendations in the resource files that Wild Montana put together.

Discussion: This did not seem to meet wilderness characteristics because of roads, interest in current motorized travel, hunting, timber use, agricultural use by permittees, including extensive fencing, corner segment issues with inholdings and boundaries do not match well with topography and straight lines make road segments potentially difficult to maintain to inholdings.

BCC participants were asked whether they thought this should be a Wilderness area. All present voted that this is not recommended as a wilderness area.

The group will work through the specific management recommendations to determine which management type will be recommended overall.

Agricultural Use:

- Agricultural - just grazing, none cropped and irrigated. No water and grazing.
- Unlike Hidden Pasture, no easy water within the boundaries of the WSA. State land could make the decision to pipe Poison Lake water into the area for a little more water, but it is limited.
- Real problem with water availability.

Group noted that it would be helpful to get some input from permittees before making a final determination, but it appears that agricultural use would continue much as it has right now.

Vote: Preliminary recommendation to maintain BLM oversight of grazing leases without any recommended changes. This was unanimous. Before the final recommendation vote, there is interest in talking with the permittees to make sure that the BCC understanding is correct.

Cultural: Indigenous and Settlement:

There are artifacts, but no Areas of cultural environmental concern (ACEC). BLM required a cultural inventory for any changes to the landscape ahead of time.

BCC participants thought it would be useful to consult with the tribes to make sure there are not significant artifacts that have not been noted.

Vote: Preliminary recommendation that BLM cultural site analysis before projects are put in place is sufficient protection for artifacts within the area, pending corroboration from the tribes. The vote was unanimous.

Designated Roads and Trails:

Discussion was that maintenance and existence of the roads seems to be used at a low-use area. There is interest from the OHV community to open an additional loop trail with public access. This is thought to be less impactful than out and back roads for recreation because people tend to stay on trails more. There was interest in maintaining and fixing roads that are open so that routes are in good shape.

It was pointed out that Appendix O has BLM road maintenance levels in it.

For all: Homework is to look at those levels in Appendix O and come back to discuss recommendations on maintenance. Group will return and discuss the appropriate management recommendation to ensure the road network and maintenance management reflects consensus.

Business and Administrative Use of Roads:

Several factors were discussed, including wanting an option to build additional temporary or permanent roads and wanting to look at seasonal use in more detail. There is more interest in OHV, forest management, and fire roads and reclamation use of roads. At this point, the group did not identify any limits on amount or type of road use.

Group was asked to think about types of restrictions on roads that might be appropriate. The group will return to this at a later date

For motorized use: Have some options to think about recreations.

- How many restrictions do you want for roads?
- Need to revisit this
- Return to this

Quiet Recreation:

There was discussion that hunters may want solitude and that on USFS land, there are areas with signage that closes the roads only during hunting season. At this point, there is no

information either way as to whether hunters would like such a thing in this area. It was noted that access is very long into the area, so there are less hunting pressures than areas around Bell Lime Kiln.

No decisions were made, but there was a note that few horse recreationalists are likely to use the area, given the type of roads, lack of water and length of access.

Specific Questions:

- Is there any call for any closure guidance, beyond suggesting BLM had discretion to identify any problems and set closures as needed?

Fisheries:

This is not applicable, due to lack of surface water.

Wildlife:

- Hunting: Wildlife management - year round wildlife area. In that area, FWP puts tracking on cow elk and has some motorized access to do this. Need to be able to collar them and manage them
- This area is two drainages in a big landscape and it is helpful to manage this in context of larger landscape
- Habitat is in good shape, but there is some conifer encroachment - sage grouse and bighorn both need the sage.
- Would like to see more conifer encroachment program -BLM has a plan to encourage juniper/doug fir and do prescription burns and mechanical removal where needed.

- Vote: Defer the BLMs conifer encroachment plan for district - BLM will weigh in on vegetation and prescribed fire. Unanimous vote on this approach. No other wildlife restrictions were noted at this time

Right of Way:

There appears to be no right of way currently within the boundary. Given the rugged area, it appears that major siting is not likely.

There was a suggestion of a minor right of way - the same as in Hidden Pasture. This would allow minor changes, but not major ones. There is some difference of opinion on this point. What do we want here? There appears to be no ROW in place now. There were questions on some right of way needs that the group needed to discuss further.

Questions, Concerns and any Public Comment

A concern was raised as to whether the BCC is wasting time with this point by point discussion. It would be quicker to turn over management decisions to the BLM.

Responses to this idea varied, but there was a request to continue with the detail, since the group had agreed to hear each other out and use that information to steer our decisions. It was also noted that in order to get BLM and USFS land out of the limbo of study areas, it has to go through Congress. The track record is that bundles that show support from a broad group of stakeholders has been the most successful approach. There was also concern voiced that if this discussion isn't conducted locally, the solutions would be imposed on the local areas that might be more restrictive than is wanted.

In the past, there had been an attempt to drop the WSAs and return to general BLM management. That effort died. The public needs confidence that a group with many stakeholders found middle ground and is confident that the management will uphold the values identified. Compromise was noted as a way to get these areas released from study status.

Group mentioned such considerations as forest health, grasslands, and other factors that have several options for management.

Next Meeting: September 14 - Italian Peaks and Garfield Peak tour