

**Beaverhead County Collaborative
Notes
October 25, 2023
Borden's
103 W Legion Ave, Whitehall, MT 59759
1:00 pm-3:30
Whitehall and Zoom**

Attending: Sen. Jeff Wellborn, SD 36; Zach Owen, Beaverhead CD; Jeff Johnson, Landowner; Byron Martinell, Landowner; Colin Cooney, Trout Unlimited; Barb Cestero, The Wilderness Society (alternate); Bill Hodge, The Wilderness Society; Aubrey Bertram, Wild Montana; Rep. Ken Walsh;

Guests Attending: Kerry White, Center for Balanced Use; Jack Curren, Office of Rep. Zinke; Brad , Office of Steve Daines; Steve Kimball, DNRC

Review and Updates

- Tour Summary from September 14 Italian Peaks and Garfield Peak Tour
Accepted
- Budget Update

Zach Owen provided an update of funds spent to date. He highlighted that there was funding that was restricted to specific expenditures such as facilitation and support of travel.

Travel stipends are available for those traveling on their own dime and for those who need to attend the Northern Forest Collaboration conference.

- Upcoming events and announcements
 - Aubrey Bertram, Wild Montana: Taking a three month sabbatical Jan-March. Emily Cleveland will reallocate those responsibilities. Don't have anyone to come for those three months - still part of the collaborative and group can reach out as needed. TWS will be the proxy during that time. If there is any emergency, Emily Cleveland will be the contact.
 - Mike Durglo has moved onto a new position at CSKT and will not be able to advise the group on cultural resources.
 - Upper Missouri Conservation Area - [FWS proposal](#). Jim Bekey: FWS is seeking public comment through November 27 (check) to get conservation easements in SW Montana using Land and Water Funds. They will work on a land protection plan and expect that in late winter and spring. They've done this in other areas, but couldn't do it this year, so this is an expansion. Focus funding and energy

here. Private land overlaps in geography, but not the type of land with this group. Send comments to contact on the website. Read that proposal and There is a comment period

- What to do in inclement weather with meetings?
- Colin: Leadership Team - put together the Op-Ed and leadership team and then the whole collaborative to get more publicity. This will be out for review and language from the charter and then the group will look at that. This is part of the effort to communicate with the larger community.
- Steve Kimball: The Montana Forest Collaborative Workshop at the Hilton Garden Inn in Missoula in the first week of November for collaboration. BCC members who attend can have travel reimbursed. If you go, send that travel information to Zach Owen
- Brett Slaughter: Senator Daines - working on the Farm Bill.
- Jack Curren: Representative Zinke: House has a speaker and will be moving forward with legislation and passing the appropriations with energy and natural resources soon.

Discussion of BCC Scope

BCC members were asked about the current scope in the charter and how the discusses peripheral issues that may have an effect on core work.

BCC members who spoke said that the continued focus on wilderness study areas and recommended wilderness areas in Beaverhead County, organized into bundles makes sense.

The stated interest was to focus on the things that Congressional passage is required.

For the future, if an issue is not focused specifically on those areas, but may have interest to the group, it will be brought up in updates and announcements. If the issue may have a direct impact on those areas, then having it on the agenda as part of the discussion of relevant areas will be important.

Proposed Work Timeline for Big Sheep Creek areas

Several members of the group have asked to move more quickly through the management recommendations for the areas in the Big Sheep watershed area for the individual areas.

The three that have been agreed upon are:

- Bell Lime Kiln
- Italian Peaks
- Garfield Peak

There was also discussion of whether Henneberry should be included in this bundle as well.

For each, area:

- Want a narrative with bullets that can be passed onto the Congressional delegation, like what was done for Hidden Pasture

- Format: Document our process, have a fairly complete citation of references and experts for each area can be added. Bill Hodge will help with scribing/homework
- Would like to make sure we can show our decision-making and rationale is helpful

Target Deadline:

Timeline for Bell Lime Kiln, Recommended Wilderness areas - overall to have a package by this meeting, November and December and January. Henneberry would be directly afterwards as needed.

The intention is to try to force ourselves and something to put together. If we have open questions, the group can move forward. This is the target deadline.

There was discussion on Henneberry, and overall the group leans toward including it in this bundle for the following reasons:

- Had some landowner interest in resolving that - Roger Peters is interested in this area
- Henneberry doesn't fit well with the Centennials or Pioneers, so this is the closest set of areas and has some similarity in landowners
- If we skip including this, if this goes to Congress, if this would be a stumbling block, if someone is going to include this other area?
- Preliminary look at the Henneberry make sense, don't leave it behind that would lead tag ends that might bring up areas
- Move forward on the work and can do a Henneberry area earlier and a good road through most of it so if a tour is needed, we could probably do it long before summer
- There was discussion on whether it would make sense to put Henneberry with Bell Lime Kiln and Hidden Pasture and put the Forest Service areas in a different package.

Overall, the group thought that having both BLM and FS areas in this bundle would be a more coherent bundle. Having FS lands together would include the Centennial Mountains, which are quite different in geography and landowners. Having some diversity could also be a good strategy for getting it through Congress. Both Congressional delegation representatives felt getting a balance and local input was important.

Action: Complete management recommendations bullets for each of the following areas by the end of the January meeting:

- Bell Lime Kiln
- Italian Peaks
- Garfield Peak
- As available: Henneberry

Given this pace, the group needs to gather information, share it with Karen for posting and review it. A subgroup that can help worksmith the management recommendations will also be needed.

Megan Mullowney, US Forest Service

Brief overview of roadless recommendations

- 1982 planning rule and revised 2012 rule, the Forest Service must consider and evaluate areas that may be suitable for wilderness. Evaluation of roadless areas occurs during forest planning efforts.
- Inventoried roadless areas are under the 2001 roadless rule - national forests did a full inventory of roadless areas and have their own set of management recommendations.
- Roadless areas may be suitable for recommendations. USFS must manage for roadless quality - habitat, ESA and threatened, primitive/ semi-primitive recreations, cultural, other unique characteristics and were done. Inventoried roadless areas
- In the Forest Plan 2009 update, took a chunk of roadless areas and designated a recommended wilderness area because of inventoried wilderness recommendations
- Question: Can you change the boundaries of the recommended wilderness areas? Technically the roadless inventory areas were set and submitted maps and can get a hold of the document and the Forest Planning process. Have not seen a boundary change, but will try to follow up on this.
- Inventoried roadless areas - in the future plan, if not recommended wilderness in future plan, still inventoried roadless. It isn't overlapping with recommended wilderness areas, but more protective than general designations and less protective than recommended wilderness areas
- How do either change in status? Only entity that can designate Wilderness is Congress. USFS only recommends, same as recommended roadless inventory - either can go to change to Wilderness and Congress has done so

Qualities for recommended wilderness areas

- Recommended wilderness areas go through a four set process: inventory, evaluation, recommendation
- Criteria: Size - ideally 5K minimum; man made improvements - roads, trails, facilities, etc.; other improvements and an evaluation of whether those improvements were before the Forest was designated, or before the roadless inventory process. Things like range improvements, air strips, phone lines, structures, dwellings do not necessarily preclude from recommendation
- Italian Peaks: This recommended area would add lands, upland shrublands and grasslands to the system, has strong public support, and under the alternative portions protect wildlife habitat.
- Garfield Peak: This recommended area includes underrepresented shrub and grass, and mixed public support. There is an additional roadless 6 thousand acres in addition

and roadless timber and roadless rule, to secure wildlife habitat to the area, protects from possibility of issues There is moderate oil and gas, could mine without roads.

Questions:

- Why wasn't Deadman drainage excluded from the recommended wilderness area? Not sure if this answer could be found out, but will follow up [Note: Public comment suggested exclusion of this area during determination]
- Difference in management between two types:
 - Roadless: Prohibition to road building and timber cutting - there are exceptions to these two prohibitions - for example, can designate motorized trails
 - Recommended wilderness is more restrictive
- Fires - can construct a road in roadless inventory area
- Thinning - can be allowed in the roadless inventory areas if it improves characteristics areas.
- Roadless areas may have roads in them
- Recommended wilderness areas: Management of recommended areas - there are values that they have to manage for. When writing a plan, these characteristics must be supported. In the 2009 Beaverhead Deer Lodge Forest plan, it excluded motorized use and mountain biking for any recommended wilderness areas in the Forest. Change would require amending the forest plan. These are prescriptive in the plan because they have to protect the characteristics of the area by Congress and placing sideboards - not a *de facto* wilderness designation. If at some point, if Congress considered the area doesn't pass a Wilderness designation, these restrictions would remain in place until the forest plan revision.
- Wildland fire - can manage fire in recommended and designated wilderness areas. The Beaverhead Deer Lodge Forest has developed procedures including fire. If it is Wilderness, mechanical treatments and harvest are not allowed. Some suppression actions in recommended wilderness areas are not easily accomplished, but if life and property are at risk a waiver can be approved. Only two types of fire - naturally caused areas, or those ignited by FS officers, but must have a fire management plan for the wilderness. For Congressionally designated areas, preference for uses that are compatible to the Wilderness designation. But in areas that might affect the local community can do things like helicopter use exceptions in emergencies.
- What is wildlife management in the area? Is there active wildlife management in wildlife management? Need to follow administrative procedures, will need to complete all procedures, but this allows for significant work like collaring and other active management as long as the administrative procedures are followed.
- How much is the discretion of managers? Group is concerned that management will follow their vision. How do we address this so this is implemented with areas?
- For Wilderness: There are prohibitions, there are ways to manage with exceptions. The agency used to make a decision on whether to violate prohibitions. These things can be done with a quick decision. What would help is if line management could follow things well. It is important to make sure that wildlife, other factors are using the right steps so

that decisions are durable. MRA - must follow this and think about the recommendation product for Congress -

- When Congress designates, they can include narrative and descriptions to show how the unique areas - historic grazing, mining, structures have all been called out and highlighted so that wilderness areas are managed to ensure those factors are included. It would be helpful for this group to help Congress include narrative on activities that are important in the designation.
- There is variation in how this is accomplished. In California, the regional office said they couldn't use chainsaws; however, chainsaws could be allowed, because slow actions are degrading wilderness. Must also be mindful of the fact that safeguarding wilderness characteristics.
- Both the Italian Peaks and Garfield Peak are recommended wilderness areas. When the group gets to the Pioneers, there is a state act that requires that the Forest Service must freeze in time in the 1977 act. These are static and don't have management discretion.
- Pending designation, use of chainsaws are not restricted in recommended wilderness areas in Beaverhead Deer Lodge Forest areas.
- Motorized use varies. In the Tetons, they must use motorized saws. To what extent do the roads and trails maintenance bringing in big timbers for trail building fit in? - Minimum tool necessarily is in the MRA framework. In the Montana 1997 act, things like chainsaws can be used. Units do not have absolutely the same approach to this on this Forest because of different management requirements.
- What about roads outside recommended wilderness areas? Maintaining roads in roadless inventory roadless - most was closed to use in 2009 forest plan and included those inventory roadless areas and remaining are open.

Action Follow-ups: Information from Forest Service

- Verify changing boundaries
- Deadman Creek - why excluded
- Any fire management notes

Bell Lime Kiln Discussion, cont.

Big issues:

- Mining:
 - Need more on mining on rare earth deposits? Craig did a great job for timber, but can we get something on the potential for this area for the areas? Could we get more?
 - Montana Mining Association shared a hard rock minerals map that showed higher potential in the northeast corner
 - Oil and gas: BLM has all federal management decisions and involved in the decisions - the areas that are available for leasing and in the Dillon office RMP - review

- **Backcountry Conservation Area vs. Appendix Q:** Let's look at appendix Q - look at Appendix Q again, do we have anything that can't do that? Action: Look at Appendix Q and action - Also Appendix Q and recommendations and get that. For the next meeting, try to look at Appendix Q to see what management would revert to if the WSA was simply removed.

Concerns: Bad weather What to do? Participants wanted to continue to hold meetings in inclement weather, given the desire to speed up discussion. This implies that some meetings may move to virtual, based on weather.

Can offer the NRCS office available - need a little heads up. Issue with audio from Bordon's. Jeff Welborn is ok with Stock Drive as a site to gather too, if people need help getting access to zoom if the weather is bad.

Participants asked to make a determination a day or two in advance so everyone can get notified and we don't have to scramble

Sen. Wellborn - the audio is better on this option than the hybrid at Bordon's, so this was better as an option - figure out a way to do it. We have equal access to technology, so it is up to us.

Action: Set up procedure and alerts or group and an option to gather in Dillon.

Public Comments

No public comments were offered.

Next Meeting - November 17, 1-3:30 at Borden's in Whitehall

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83007398114>

Meeting ID: 830 0739 8114

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