

**Beaverhead County Collaborative
Notes
Work Session
October 17, 2024
1:00 pm-3:30pm
Borden's in Whitehall and [Zoom](#)
103 W Legion Ave**

BCC Members Attending: Tom Rice, Beaverhead County Commission; Jeff Wellborn, SD 36; Tom Welch, HD 72; Gene Loder, Citizen at large; Zach Owen, Beaverhead Conservation District; Jeff Johnson, landowner; Byron Martinell, landowners; Casey Hackethorn, Trout Unlimited; Jim Berkey, The Nature Conservancy; Aubrey Bertram, Wild Montana; Craig Blubaugh, Sun Mountain Lumber; Parke Scott, motorized recreation; Jack Kirkley, quiet recreation.

Note: Gene Loder is representative of the citizen at large seat. He noted that he is the head of the Beaverhead Outdoors Association.

BCC Advisors Attending: Steve Kimball, Montana Forest Collaboration Network

Guests Attending: Troy Smith, landowner, Bill Hodge

Facilitation and Notes: Karen Filipovich

Review and Updates

July Meeting Notes: Jeff Johnson motioned to accept. Jack Kirkley seconded. The notes were accepted unanimously.

Budget Update: Zach Owen. The only expense recorded lately has been facilitation. There are still some grant funds for facilitation. The DNRC grant has funds for travel and meetings. We haven't spent much in this category, and it is possible that some of that money may need to be returned.

It was noted that the DNRC grant can be amended, as long as it is within the purpose of the grant. For this group, communications expenses may be more relevant. The group will follow-up to see if such an amendment would be possible.

Upcoming events and announcements

- Montana Forest Collaborative Network: Has a conference on Oct. 31 and Nov. 1 in Missoula. Representatives from BCC are invited, as one of many collaboratives in the region. State BLM, Western States NRCS director and Forest Service personnel will also be there. This gathering includes what's coming, what is new, and a chance to come with other collaboratives. How the agencies are challenged. It is at the Hilton Garden Inn in Missoula. [Registration](#) is \$50 and both that and travel expenses can be

reimbursed through BCC's current grant. Casey Hackathorn said he would likely be able to go. Another member would also be welcomed.

Southwest Montana Multi-use Package - Public Outreach and Communications

Lima Meeting - Debrief on the September 18, 2024

The first community meeting on the Southwest Montana Multi-use package was held in Lima.

Meeting Comments:

- Many attendees came to the meeting with inaccurate information about what was in the package and the purpose of the meeting. This led to initial tension in the room.
- The introductory presentation was good at explaining the history and motivation. People did not have the information on the package at the outset, and didn't seem to read the handout or look at the map at the beginning. This was a bit of a missed opportunity in terms of an opportunity to educate the group. Might have been useful to go through that content for the area at the beginning.
- One attendee mentioned the Delphi Technique. Many participants appeared to have heard of the idea, promulgated by Albert Burns. This idea has been attached to any small group discussion. This meant that the initial format of information stations were seen as something meant to stymie understanding by many attendees. The BCC and facilitator were responsive to attendee resistance to that format, but it is something to think about for future events. As the facilitator said in response to being told about this idea and being thanked for changing the format, she had not heard of the technique and the intent of the group is to inform participants.
- As BCC was able to explain the components of the package, the mood in the room became much less tense and people were able to ask and get answers to their questions.
- There were a lot of people who wanted to know what was going on with the BCC. Meetings have been public, but it appears that there needs to be much more information and opportunities to ask questions.
- No one representing the government was there. Forest, BLM were not present. They could be available and answer other things at the end for some of the technical questions that came up.
- Needed to talk more about how the recommendations support multiple uses including grazing, forest health, and think stepping people through the problems and proposed solutions is important. The package is balanced, and we think that will have a chance to bring these together. Could have unpacked that up front. Hope we can bring that together for everyone before anything else. Would have helped that we'd set this off up front. Would have liked to have more. For instance, the meeting eventually got to road and route recommendations, but it took a long time to highlight those recommendations to enhance motorized access in the area adjoining the Italian Peaks and Garfield Mountain. Discussion barely mentioned a recommendation to add segments in the Bell Lime Kiln area as well, plus solutions for the County road, BLM road, and landowner

access in Hidden Pasture. Overall, highlighting these recommendations would be helpful.

- There was significant compromise to get to the package recommendations. A collaborative seeks solutions that can draw support from a range of organizations and provide solutions for many different users is important. There are significant opponents who want more designated Wilderness areas and those who don't want to see any designated Wilderness and only favor full release options. Both attack collaborative work These absolutist positions also have not had success in getting packages through Congress and resolving these lands that have been in this "temporary" status for many years.
- The meeting was too informal in how it presented the BCC members, and the necessary pivot in format made it more difficult for BCC members to feel they knew their roles. Because members had started near the information stations, they ended up scattered around the room and were not sufficiently highlighted. The request is to keep members together, use name tags, and ensure that everyone knows how all the parts of the package work. Visually, members were scattered around the room, no name tags, no roles for people laid out for folks. More preparation and support for BCC members would be helpful before meetings.
- BCC members did not speak with a unified voice on all topics. Members also struggled with being able to speak on behalf of interests that are not their own. Additionally, BCC members have made the commitment to support decisions made under the consensus rules in the Charter. This was not fully done at the Lima meeting. More practice and help in preparation is needed.
- Facts, rather than perceptions, are needed to ensure that Beaverhead County residents and anyone interested in these public lands are working from a common understanding of the status of the lands and the recommended management changes.
- There was not enough discussion how the permittees and adjoining landowners were invited to meetings or had conversations with individual BCC members to help ensure their concerns were heard and addressed.

Safety and Feeling Welcomed:

- One member expressed feeling unsafe. The initial mood of the meeting was tense, and it wasn't clear what the role of the sheriff was or if the meeting would turn hostile. The facilitator was also told after that meeting that there are Beaverhead residents who do not feel welcomed at community meetings and as a result, do not attend.
- Meeting format and communications ahead of time could be useful.

Collaborative Norms and Promoting the Agreement:

The collaborative norms were brought up. All members of the Beaverhead County Collaborative agreed to:

- Provide alternative solutions if there is disagreement
- Support the decisions of the collaborative. Expected to be public spokespeople.

There was concern that not all members were speaking about the package in a unified voice, and that the code of conduct has not been fully followed. Though most individual components of the package had full consensus agreement, the package as a whole had a medium level of agreement. This met the consensus level agreed to and outlined in the BCC charter. There were two points of discussion on how members needed to their obligations under the code of conduct:

- 1) The group had reached agreement on the first package, under its charter. The expectation is that all members can support this agreement, even if they did not fully agree with each component. The point of the group is to balance interests and find solutions. These lands require an act of Congress to change their status.
- 2) Several members expressed that they and their stakeholders had made significant concessions to other stakeholders and used groups in order to find a package that was balanced and had something for each party. Frustration was expressed that these compromises had not been acknowledged by every member of the group.
 - For instance, wilderness advocates are not in the business of releasing WSAs, but it was important to support the ranchers, hunters and recreationists who needed specific solutions. These groups have supported BCC recommendations, even though they have outside groups that are absolutists and will only support recommendations that all WSA and recommended wilderness areas become designated Wilderness areas.
 - Significant language supporting grazing, permittee access, and active management to support wildlife and fisheries is written into recommendations so that the uncertainty that ranchers, hunters, and wildlife advocates deal with would be addressed.
 - The overlay management recommendations that would clarify the management of the Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA) lands adjacent to the Garfield Mountain and Italian Peaks areas was added to the initial package to ensure that the group addressed motorized recreation, concern about hunting, agricultural permittee, and forest health access and ability to work in these areas. It was also recommended so that it is explicit that the BCC does not support future expansions of Wilderness designations.
 - These collaborative groups around the state seek solutions together. The alternative is extreme groups on any side either advocate for preserving or releasing all lands. This approach has not been successful, and group members pointed out this means that management continues to be a problem.

Communications:

BCC members wanted to work on explaining their first package of recommendations and the Beaverhead County Collaborative.

- Highlighting facts, collaborative process, and the details of the recommendations needs to be further explained so that every member can speak about the details.
- Want to be able to explain the solutions to problems like road maintenance, hunting, and agricultural access.

- Would like to have more detailed information about each area, so every BCC member can present information and answer questions more easily.
- Want to get the word out in a number of different formats so that the community can understand it.
- Want to better understand some of the other things out there, like the Beaverhead Resource Policy.

Jeff Johnson is expecting to present the information to the FWP advisory committee and Stockgrowers in the next couple of months.

Other members were asked to identify groups that would be interested in hearing more about this. Initial groups identified were the Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary Club, and the Beaverhead Watershed Committee.

There was a suggestion to have more news articles, videos, testimonials, and posts explaining the status of the lands in this package and the BCC recommendations. Op-eds in the Dillon Tribune would be helpful. It was noted that the BCC page that the Beaverhead CD provides is somewhat difficult to update, but Zach will look into ways to upload more information.

Talking further with neighbors, permittees, and other residents is important. The group also still would like to hold a BCC hosted meeting in Dillon. Once the group has had some time to share information and hear from a lot of people, going to the County Commission will be a future step.

Task: A subgroup of the BCC volunteered to go through the detailed agreement language and maps and write more detailed answers to questions that have come up. Aubrey, Casey, Jack K., and Zach agreed to create a draft the group can review. Jeff J. agreed to act as an advisor.

Task: BCC members are asked to review communications drafts and identify groups that would be interested in having a BCC member or members come and present information.

Transitions

The Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partners person has been rehired. Randy Chapin has taken over and has indicated his interest in continuing to represent those areas. He expects to be able to come to the next BCC meeting.

Sen. Jeff Wellborn will be moving to another job. Several members expressed their interest in retaining his expertise and membership in some form. This was also brought up more generally as a transition issue as group members moved on and off and what kind of interest and time legislators might have. Looking ahead, there is interest in landowners in other areas of Beaverhead County after this package. This was a topic that needs further discussion.

There is a vacancy on the BCC leadership team as well, so members were asked to think about capacity and ways to make this change. The team has had one member switch out already, but individuals were asked to think about their ability to do the extra work to help guide the BCC process. Decisions continue to be made by the full BCC.

There was also a call for a charter clarification on how members are removed. The concern raised is that there is no mechanism spelled out in that instance. Draft language was brought up for an initial look. Group members were asked to think about what language might be helpful to clarify this issue.

Questions, Concerns, and Public Comment

Troy: It would be helpful to keep the information simple. What are criteria, maps, and this is why we have these problems and the specific criteria and these recommendations? This is why, point by point steps and this. It would be helpful to have maps that show the current land status, recommended status, and changes and how they help different user groups. The plan recommendations would help my operation in Hidden Pasture.

Steve Kimball (MFCN, BCC Advisor): He has worked for both the Forest Service and DNRC. He appreciates the hard work this group has done since 2021. Wondered if you'd stick with it, and you have. Feel a lot of commitment and pride in the product.

Moving forward: Work on speaking with one voice. Need more internal work to get there. Is it working on getting better materials and practice, or is it a code of conduct issue? There are legitimate concerns about more work to get alignment. Getting better alignment will help in talking with the public.

When you do go public, take time to explain the status quo and problems and explain why you need to do something. Explain how these recommendations make it better for the different stakeholders and users. Make sure everyone can explain how these recommendations will make it better.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30pm

The next meeting is scheduled for November 21, 2024.