

## **Beaverhead County Collaborative**

### **Notes**

**July 18, 2024**

**1:00 pm-3:30pm**

**Borden's in Whitehall and [Zoom](#)**

**103 W Legion Ave**

### **1:00 Welcome and Introductions**

#### **Attending:**

**BCC Members:** Bill Hodge, The Wilderness Society; Zach Owen, Beaverhead Conservation District; Casey Hackathorn, Trout Unlimited; Sen. Jeff Wellborn, SD 36; Jeff Johnson, landowner; Byron Martinell, landowner; Tom Rice, Beaverhead County Commissioner; Jack Atcheson, Jr., Wild Sheep Foundation; Gene Loder, citizen at large; Scott Laird, Theodore Roosevelt COnservation Partnership; Craig Blubaugh, Sun Mountain Lumber; Jack Kirkley, quiet recreation; Casey Hackathorn, Trout Unlimited; Aubrey Bertram, Wild Montana

**Guests:** Cindy Perdue-Dolan, Senator Daines staff; Steve Kimball, MFCN

**Proxies:** Gene Loder for Parke Scott; Sen. Wellborn for Ken Walsh; Scott Laird for Jim Berkey; Jeff Johnson for Tom Welsh

## **Notes**

### **June Notes**

Sen. Wellborn - motioned to accept the notes. Bill Hodge seconded the notes. They were accepted unanimously.

### **Budget Update**

Zach Owen gave the budget update. No real change since last month. DNRC Forestry grant still have substantial funds and those can be used for travel expenses, tours and public meetings. Members traveling to the meeting on their own dime are encouraged to submit travel mileage to Zach Owen.

### **Upcoming events and announcements**

Scott Laird is leaving TRCP employment, so will step off his seat. He is anticipating that his organization will replace him with the new hire, and encouraged BCC members to remind TRCP how valuable it is to have that voice. The other members thanked him for his time and work on BCC.

### **Finalize Package: Discussion on Outstanding Items**

Participants reviewed the summary of the agreements to date.

It was noted that the work in the last three months since the five WSA and recommended wilderness areas were reported has been to see if there is an agreement that could be made around the inventoried roadless area that adjoin the Italian Peaks and Garfield Mountain areas.

The tasks at the last meeting were to finalize the language the group agreed to in June and also to find an option to minimize the acreage in the proposed Conservation Management Area (CMA) to address concerns about limiting mineral rights.

- The language and map were presented. The CMA would cover the portion of the inventoried roadless area (IRA) near IP and GM and would be about 28,000 acres. The north border runs straight east from the boundary of the Italian Peaks area, a change from the further north idea expressed earlier. This was seen as a positive change.
- Because the recommendation is to have these recommendations in a Congressional Act, these would be permanent changes, unless a future Congress changed it.
- This would be more prescriptive than the IRA, since it would have more language that enhances high quality motorized recreation and calls out route maintenance and the ability to add segments.
- Motorized recreation and roads would still be subject to the travel management planning

The language is a reflection of what the group decided in June. The group reviewed the final language.

- Added traditional agricultural and outfitting/guided in purpose to further clarify those are supported
- Motorized travel: It is still subject to travel management. Can still send in proposed changes and travel processes are still in there. Want to highlight motorized recreation and help USFS see a prescription to enhance high quality motorized recreation.
- Mechanized use and game cart areas - added to be clear
- Grazing - added this to motorized to make sure it is allowed, plus the existing language supporting permitted agricultural operations.
- Recreational special uses: to included outfitting and guiding
- Vegetation - ensures that activities from invasive weeds to forest health activities can take place - this language was unchanged from the previous month
- Mineral - closed to new mining, only in force once the package passes Congress and is signed. Boundaries were designed to minimize mineral exploration potential in the broader landscape.
- Vegetation Management - includes trees, sagebrush, grasslands and other vegetation management activities.

The revised map was reviewed. The question was if the CMA boundary proposed met the desires of the group to ensure that recreation is enhanced, the other group values of agriculture, cultural resources, wildlife, and fishing/hunting are met.

- It was affirmed that the boundary would come straight across from the northern boundary of the Italian Peaks area, rather than further north at Simpson Creek.

There was an observation that this was not an activity in the charter, but it takes away the ambiguity of the management in the area and draws a crystal clear line for agencies to follow. There was thanks that the group has been putting in the extra work to try to ensure that this addresses concerns.

Jeff Wellborn motioned: **Accept this language and recommended boundaries for the CMA as an addition to the already voted on package.**

Bill Hodge seconded the motion.

**Vote:** Passes with 14 yes, one neutral and 2 no. - Passes with medium consensus.  
The language and map are added to the overall package.

**Package:**

- Karen Filipovich asked the group if there were any other issues that needed to be addressed with the package that includes the five WSA and recommended wilderness areas and the now approved CMA area. None were brought up, so the package stands as approved.

**Discussion:**

- There was interest in ensuring that this is shared with the public. Since it is not a governmental group, there are no formal requirements for comment, but there was a note that landowner and stakeholder comment has been heard throughout and there is interest in getting this out to the public and that should be a major next effort.
- These are public lands - For Congress to pass this, we need public support
- There is a need to go to the communities. If something brings something good up, the BCC can go back and incorporate this.
- It was noted that some on both sides won't like this, since any package involves compromise.
- Cindy Purdue-Dolan from Senator Daines' office said this group has done great work. She likes it and wants more public input as it goes along. This isn't the only thing that Congress is going to look at and robust comment and public input helps this.
- It was observed that the group and a Congressional process provides lots of ways people will have a chance to have more opportunities to weigh in as members of the public. BCC wants to keep it a transparent process.

**Further communications and next steps:**

- Would like to make sure the group works with the Congressional delegation throughout this process
- Need for communication and explanation. The group has worked to ensure that there are enhancements and protections for every stakeholder, but the language in the agreement is written in administrative language and the overall set of areas is complete.
- Want to ensure that everyone understands what is in this package and how it helps different users.

- Need something that can be passed out and a clear handout
- Need clear maps
- Need to have a lot of information sharing and good, easy to understand information
- Will be important to remind people that BCC has recommendations - that Congress is the one who acts. We have a lot of work.
- Several BCC members have communications staff that can help put these materials together.
- There was some concern that the Conservation Management Area might be confusing, since it is conserving existing practices and enhancing high quality motorized recreation. The situation with the Missouri Headwaters Conservation Area and confusion about what it did was an example of poor communication. The CMA name was chosen because it is in existing legislation, but group members thought that this was an example of how clearly explaining what the package actually is all at once would be helpful and wanted to emphasize the overall objectives and area in the overall package name.
- There was a reminder that the group did not want to put a neon sign that says “come here and overrun the area” with the names and approach. This is much more about resolving problems and keeping the overall status quo of the area. Definitions help, and it was noted that the package as a whole is a detailed multi-use set of recommendations.
- Need to ensure that BCC can fully explain the package before talking with the public, so getting the handouts with a map is really important.
- There is a need to clearly explain the process and how the group got to this set of recommendations
- All group members were asked to wait for communications materials and then talk to the public together so there isn’t confusion about what the recommendations are.
- A first public meeting in Lima was seen as essential to loop back with area residents and permittees. It is also expected this will go to the County Commission and other interested groups after that.
- Many members noted that this will take time and it is important to do this well so that the status of these areas can finally be resolved.

**Task:** BCC leadership, with help from Trout Unlimited, The Wilderness Society and any other organizations with communication staff will help draft the handouts, maps and clear explanations. The BCC group as a whole will review the materials and approve them.

**Task:** BCC members were asked to wait for the draft communications materials and be prepared to review and comment. Group was asked to come to the meeting in Lima, TBD date, hopefully in September - this may not be the groups’ usual meeting day.

**Task:** Jeff Johnson and Byron Martinell will check with the Lima High School and find available dates and reserve it for a public meeting.

**Public comment:**

- No comment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:05.

Next Meeting - August 22, 2024