

**Beaverhead County Collaborative**  
**Agenda**  
**November 16, 2023**  
**Borden's**  
**103 W Legion Ave, Whitehall, MT 59759**  
**1:00 pm-3:30**  
**Whitehall and [Zoom](#)**

**BCC Members Attending:** Tom Rice, County Commissioner; Sen. Jeff Welborn, SD 36; Zack Owen, Beaverhead Conservation District; Jeff Johnson, Landowner; Byron Martinell, Landowner; Colin Cooney, Trout Unlimited; Scott Laird, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership; Bill Hodge, The Wilderness Society; Aubrey Bertram, Wild Montana; Craig Blubaugh, Sun Mountain Lumber; Parke Scott, Motorized Recreation; Jack Kirkley, Quiet Recreation; Jack Atcheson, Jr., Wild Sheep Foundation

**BCC Advisors Attending:** Tim Love, Montana Forest Collaboration Network

**Guests:** Luke Peters, Dragging Y Cattle; Kaleb Scarberry, Amanda Rossi, Montana Bureau of Mines of Geology; Jack Curren, staff for Representative Zinke

**Notes and Facilitation:** Karen Filipovich

## **Detailed Notes**

**October Notes** - For Review, corrections and acceptance

Colin Cooney motioned to accept, and Aubrey Bertram seconded. Notes were unanimously accepted.

**Budget Update** - Zach Owen

Facilitation continued to be the major expense. There will be some travel expenses related to BCC members going to the Northern Forest Collaboration Network event in the beginning of November. If you are a BCC member traveling on your own dime, you can get your meeting travel reimbursed - send to Zach Owen at the CD.

The grant report into the Northern Forest Collaboration Network, should receive another \$1,000. Will have another grant opportunity coming soon.

**Op-Ed - update and finalization**

Colin: Op-Ed -steering committee. Incorporated comments. If ok, then will submit to Standard and Dillonite Daily and Dillon Tribune

Group ok'd submittals. [Note: In submitting, found that the Dillonite does not take Op-Ed articles]

## **Montana Forest Collaboration Network Workshop Report**

Tim Love, Colin Cooney, Bill Hodge, Scott Laird:

Synopsis: Two days and Senators, Tracy Stone-Manning spoke. Agency leaders spoke and there were breakout groups.

There's a lot of interest in collaborative efforts. We have collaboratives in this area, but they don't exist in California. Collaboratives can be difficult and slow, but they're better than the alternative that exists in areas that don't have them.

Breakout Groups: Thoughts on issue of meeting format: There is no substitute for being in person, but many groups thought virtual also worked well. Hybrid was seen as an issue, as this group has experienced with setup. Perhaps this group should consider whether we're all together or all virtual. Something to consider and is there a way to make hybrid work better?

Parke Scott said he prefers the all in person option for meetings. Others said they liked having the option to go virtual when the weather is not good.

[Annual report](#). - handed out at the meeting and has reports on all the collaboratives. BCC is included in it.

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### **Other announcements**

Kaleb Scarberry, MBMG - will be moving to new mineral resource position in Oregon, but Amanda Rossi and other geologists at Tech can continue to help the group understand mineral and mining issues

## **Bell Lime Kiln Discussion**

The group is working to find a set of recommendations for Bell Lime Kiln. It is currently in Wilderness Study Area (WSA) status and is managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

Luke Peters, rancher and permittee in Bell Lime Kiln: Bell Lime Kiln, great county, great spot and works well with BLM and Forest Service in their grazing allotments. As a producer, he wants to maintain roads, put in new fencing and maintain watering infrastructure. They can drive in and can continue to go in with four wheelers and skid steer. There is a need to continue that flexibility. In the long-term, they need to put in infrastructure like new fences. BLM has been helpful, but it has been a little hit or miss. Access is needed for feeding, fencing, dealing with invasive species and working on stock tanks and springs.

Q for Luke: What are recreational interactions like? A: It's fine. The grazing season is relatively short and they don't see a lot of recreation issues. It isn't like Blacktail or some of the other areas in the county that get a lot of traffic. The recreation is often motorized, and there are sometimes issues with gates, but that hasn't been a major issue.

For roads, there are some issues with invasive species being brought in. See some issues with road maintenance and there are places where water bars would be useful.

Jack Atcheson: Noted that a lot of the needs of livestock and wildlife are similar. Watering holes are a big deal. He would like to see the ability to do wildlife fencing projects too.

There is a community fire plan? Tom Rice says there is a WUI plan for Beaverhead County. For example, there is a plan up by Maverick, and follows where there is building, but it does extend into the WSA.

**Amanda Rossi, and Kaleb Scarberry, Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology:**

They shared a map that had every historic mine in the area (inside and outside the WSA boundaries), combined with the geologic map that shows mineral formations. All claims in the inventory were abandoned.

There are some rare earths, thorium and pegmatites. The area has not been explored since the 1950s, but there are areas that look potentially economically interesting. The site labeled #3 is outside the WSA boundary, but the rock formation continues into the WSA.

[GIS Data hub](#) - it is available and can answer several of these questions on mining and information. In the mapper, the user can choose a base map and query the data. Can see recent earthquakes, minerals, etc. that are related to geology.

The entire state is underexplored for commodities and hard to make detailed observations. It is difficult to get a mining company to drill a deposit because it is tough country to access.

For Bell Lime Kiln, there are historic precious and base metal deposits from the abandoned mine data. Now, the economics are changing a lot. The six mines would need more investigation to figure out the potential, but the Bell Lime Kiln area is similar to Sheep Creek and there is a rare earth deposit on the ID/MT border and this geology is very similar to that geology. The MBMG economic geologist is doing the rare earth studies, but doesn't expect mining without more research and assays.

Question: What are the factors that go into high economic potential? In the US, mining exploration is not subsidized, so there are things with mining laws, state, and country are trying to figure out the piece.

For Bell Lime Kiln - what about access? Would this limit exploration? A If they went in, they'd focus on the most interesting areas, then they'd drill (expensive) in the most promising areas only - if proved, might want to look at this area. More detailed geologic mapping could be helpful.

General mining law governs mining laws - hard rock is open pit, can't be surface, so it is likely that future mining is most likely to be surface mining.

They said they could have similar maps completed for the Italian Peaks and Garfield Peak for December. The group thanked them for their work and help in understanding the potential

**Other Resource Information:** The group has also reviewed several maps and resources that BLM has completed and its current management around the area.

- Sage Grouse: habitat is partially in the area, but it is not core area
- Bighorn Sheep: It is summer range for them and the transplanted animals who like it too
- Oil and Gas: There are several limitations on timing and practices in areas surrounding the WSA
- Hard rock - there are stipulations on these
- Timber: Craig Blubaugh from Sun Mountain Lumber and BCC member summarized his analysis of the area. About 5 million board feet of timber potential is available if there is an ability to do road improvements. The area is set up to burn and also sees spruce budworm action. He recommends some thinning and some road improvements. In his opinion, it would be a mix of thinning, fuel reduction and harvest. Access is going to be an issue, and it is tough, and it would take road building and gating/road closures. Q: What about economics and what is the place for prescribed burns? There is commercial potential and prescribed burns are also part of the picture.

### **Bell Lime Kiln Recommendations**

- Is this Wilderness? The group continues to agree with the BLM recommendation that this area does not meet the characteristics of designated Wilderness.
- Cultural Resources: There is no specific special designation like there is in much of the Hidden Pasture area. Both indigenous and 1800-1900s settlement period artifacts are in the area, but overall, the group thought that the BLM process for identifying and preserving cultural resources would be sufficient. Participants present all agreed to this recommendation, with the proviso that Tribal cultural resources discussions are government to government matters.
- Agriculture: Would like to maintain the status quo, with the ability to do maintenance and improvements that are negotiated through existing BLM authority. This was approved unanimously
- Roads: It was noted that there is an access issue in this area for public use. If the land was released from WSA status, BLM could have more flexibility to make determinations
  - Want to keep current designated roads
  - Want maintenance by BLM or other entities, as determined in BLM review process
  - Maintain existing administrative uses
  - This is giving authority, not requiring funding for these activities

## 2. Do we want new temporary or permanent roads for agriculture?

- Are we willing to see roads, but don't want to see a bunch of roads
- Want to allow roads under BLM authority
- Could we leave it open to appendix Q - want to ensure that roads could be maintained and build as needed, so this is a follow-up

### Other potential road building, maintenance or upgrade possibilities:

- Mining and timber will need to be permitted under BLM rules. These seem to be acceptable for the area when there is a clear need and could be handled under existing permitting processes
- There may be some mining specific language. Garrret Smith at DEQ might be helpful, though he works on state, rather than federal projects. BLM may have some existing language that would work to make this management recommendation clear
- Feel that the underlying Appendix Q management for the area is not broad enough because it focused on semi-primitive non-motorized recreation. Perhaps Semi-primitive motorized or OHV designated to designated open routes would be a good addition
- It is possible that a loop or a better public access road would be built in the future to address the interests of recreation as well. The group did not want to preclude the possibility of limited new road building.

Recommend as a body: Existing routes are difficult to access and agency is approved to add routes as part of a travel management plan -

This set of recommendations on the road sections was adopted unanimously by participants.

There was a question raised as to whether it would be useful to designate this a Backcountry Conservation Area. It could be easier to convince many conservationists of this recommendation package if it were. Motorized recreation said that might make it harder. It was acknowledged that the BCA could overlay the management recommendations identified by the group. There was one neutral and one opposed to this idea. The group agreed to table this discussion of whether a BCA designation would be helpful when it comes back to look at the entire first package.

There was a request to make a final decision on when/how to address the Henneberry WSA.

Task: Colin Cooney and Bill Hodge agreed to draft the set of recommendation bullets for the group ahead of the December meeting

Task: All BCC members agreed to check in with their organizations and stakeholders to see if these preliminary recommendations discussed for Bell Lime Kiln were acceptable or if there were any areas that needed further discussion.

## **Italian Peaks & Garfield Peak**

**Task:** Identify and share any information you have about the two areas before the next meeting on December 21.

**Questions, Concerns and any Public Comment**

There was a strong request to sort out when to hold meetings in person and when online, with a question of whether there is a way to minimize or eliminate hybrid meetings. There is a split in membership about all virtual meetings - some are very comfortable and there is also some discomfort.

There was no additional public comment.

**Next Meeting - December 21, 1-3:30**