

Custer-Gallatin National Forest Working Group (CGWG)

April 8, 2015 meeting MINUTES

Custer Gallatin National Forest, 3710 Fallon St., Suite C, Bozeman, Mt.

Time	Topic	Lead	Outcomes
1:00	Opening and introductions	Prinkki/Atwood	Welcome, introductions, minutes previous meeting; agenda
1:10	Public comment	Prinkki/Atwood	Allow for Public comment/questions
1:20	Membership applications	Prinkki/Atwood	Applications (if any) considered, voted upon
1:30	Forest Service update on the North Hebgen Project	Lauren Oswald, Acting Hebgen District Ranger & ID Team members Seth, Frost, Konen, Jones, Leuschen	Project Overview Recap; Purpose and Need Discussion; Issue & Alternative Summary as developed from public input/comment.
2:45	North Hebgen Project comments; Greater Yellowstone Coalition	Joe Josephson, Greater Yellowstone Coalition	Discuss GYC's comments on the North Hebgen Project with input from USFS on comment review.
3:15	Break		
3:30	North Hebgen Project; Full membership discussion; Establish subcommittee; Consider hiring a facilitator	Atwood/Prinkki	Development of CGWG position/comments; CGWG engagement; Field trip plans
4:15	Red Lodge Mountain Land Exchange; Greater Red Lodge vegetation/habitat management (GRLA) Firefighting Operations 2015	Traute Parrie, Beartooth Ranger District Prinkki/Atwood	Establish scope of work for the CGWG; Project updates/selection; Firefighting expectations 2015(West Yellowstone smokejumpers)
4:30	2015/2016 Budget 2015 Agenda	Atwood	Set priorities/workshops Goals
4:50	May meeting plan	Atwood	Location, Agenda items, assignments for May meeting
5:00	Adjourn	Prinkki	

Meeting was called to order by Chairman John Prinkki at 1:00 PM.

Members and visitors were welcomed, and requested to introduce themselves.

Following Working Group members, guests, and congressional staff were present:

John Prinkki, Carbon County Commission
Jim Hart, Madison County Commission
Bill Wallace, Sweet Grass County Commission
Dennis Shupak, Stillwater County Commission
Marty Malone, Park County Commission
Jeff Schmidt, Red Lodge Mtn. Ski Area
Joe Josephson, Greater Yellowstone Coalition
John Beaudry, Stillwater Mining Co.
Peter Aengst (for Scott Brennan), Wilderness Society
Jerry Furtney, RY Timber
Mike Christianson, At Large Member
Brent Sinnema, Camp Creek Cattle Co.
Liz Dellwo, Sen. Daines' Office
Rachel Court, Sen. Tester's Office
Kathryn QannaYahu, EMWH
Jackie Musgrove, Ashland FH Grazing
Traute Parrie, Beartooth District Ranger
Lauren Oswald, USFS Hebgen District Ranger
Mariah Leuschen, USFS
Teris Smith, USFS
Courtney Frost, USFS Biologist
Earl Atwood, Beartooth RC&D
Virginia Kelly, GYCC
Brad Banes, MSU Extension
Bob Zimmer, GY
Kieth Konen, USFS
Fred Jones, USFS
Paul Grif
Nancy Schulz, Gallatin Wildlife

Minutes from the March 11, 2015 meeting were reviewed and amended to include discussion pertaining to the voted change in the Operating Manual. Language was added to document discussion concerning the addition counties as members of the working group. Marty Malone moved that the minutes be approved as amended, seconded by Kevin Germain. APPROVED.

USFS Staff from the inter-disciplinary team currently working on the North Hebgen project presented information about the project to clarify its stage in the overall planning process, as well as key features from the perspectives of wildlife biology, wildfire management, and silviculture. Lauren Oswald and Teri Smith provided an update on the alternatives analysis currently underway, and recapped changes to the initial scoping that have resulted from the internal review. Moving forward, the team will perform a detailed review of comments submitted by the public in response to the initial scoping letter to identify further changes or clarification needed to address public input. That analysis will be ongoing over the course of the summer.

The next USFS public meeting will be held on April 21, 2015 at the West Yellowstone Chamber, 4:30 to 7:00 pm.

From discussion at the March meeting concerning possible summer field trips (project tours), Lauren Oswald returned today with the following proposed dates the CGWG could consider to arrange a field visit for Working Group members:

July 15th August 5th September 16th October 7th

Members agreed that we should pick an early date, in case it is determined that additional field activity is needed, leaving the later months for scheduling a second event. The July 15 date was chosen by consensus, and it was agreed the field trip would be a substitute for the standard meeting that would have been held on July 8th.

Joe Josephson presented information to the members about the process and approach taken by Greater Yellowstone Coalition to develop their response and comments to the initial scoping on the North Hebgen project. Please refer to the attached summary of his presentation for details.

John Prinkki reported that an interim conference call was held with several members having keen interest in North Hebgen, to define further action that should be taken by the Working Group in regard to the project. A sub-committee was initiated as a result of this call, to specifically take up review of the project on behalf of the full membership, identify areas of concern and areas of agreement, and develop recommendations to bring back to the full committee for consideration and action. The initial committee appointments are Joe Skinner, Chair, Jim Hart, Vice Chair, Joe Josephson, Marty Malone and Scott Brennan.

The subcommittee will continue to work directly with USFS staff to gain information about the project and coordinate events that might include CGWG participation or outreach.

Chairman Prinkki asked the members if there were any others interested in participating on the committee, with the understanding that the commitment would involve a certain amount of independent research and at least one meeting or conference call per month with the committee, lasting from two to four hours. No additional members expressed interest at this time, however Mr. Prinkki left the opportunity open for any member to become involved.

As Joe Skinner was not present, Chairman Prinkki asked Vice Chairman Hart to coordinate with Joe Skinner to set up the first meeting sometime prior to the April 21 public meeting scheduled in West Yellowstone.

Chairman Prinkki asked the USFS staff to update the group on the status seasonal firefighting operations, in particular the readiness and availability of resources at West Yellowstone Interagency Fire Center.JOHN PLEASE COMPLETE THIS ONE >>

Plans for the May meeting were discussed. It was agreed the meeting would be held in Livingston on May 13, location to be identified by Marty Malone. Possible items for the meeting agenda include:

- Reports from the Hebgen Subcommittee and the April 21 Public Meeting

- Possible presentation from DNRC (Wolcott) on State approach to managing Forest resources

- USFS offered to line up Tim Reid to address Rangeland Management on FS Lands

Meeting was adjourned at 4:55 pm.

April 10, 2015 - Summary of GYC Presentation at April 8, 2015 regarding North Hebgen project

Thank you Chairman Prinkki and the rest of the group for the opportunity to say a few words regarding the greater Yellowstone coalition's scoping comments regarding the North Hebgen Multiple Resource project dated February 10, 2015.

The Greater Yellowstone Coalition (GYC) is a regional conservation organization based in Bozeman, MT with offices in Idaho and Wyoming and over 40,000 members and supporters from across the country and within the Northern Rockies. Our mission is to protect the lands, waters, and wildlife of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE), now and for future generations. Our members and board include residents living in the communities surrounding the Hebgen Ranger District and visitors enjoying the GYE and Custer Gallatin National Forest.

I might add, our comments were a collaborative effort between myself (Montana Conservation Associate), Barb Cestero (former Montana Conservation Coordinator), Shana Dunkley (Montana Wildlife Associate), Chris Colligan (Wildlife Program Coordinator), and Bob Zimmer (Water Program Coordinator). Also, GYC has been involved with this project for more than two years.

Important for this group to recognize that our comments address the entire North Hebgen project while only the southern half, Horse Butte, is within the Farm Bill priority landscapes identified by the governor's office and part of the Forest in Focus Program.

GYC is glad to see the agency performing a full scale EIS as the appropriate analysis as opposed to an EA. Can't undervalue our comment that we would like to see more collaboration with the NPS. In fact, CEQ and the USFS is required by law (citations available) to invite of fellow federal agencies with special expertise regarding environmental impacts of a proposed action. Being contiguous with Yellowstone National Park (YNP) and the affected habitat of park wildlife including grizzly bears, bison and west slope cutthroat trout – all of which require special management concerns on a variety of levels. GYC would like to see evidence of this consultation with YNP.

This requirement is related to our CGWG group values statement, "consideration for the impacts on adjacent non-forest lands and landowners."

General values GYC applies to forest restoration projects:

1/ Secure permanent conservation protection. We look at this not only in terms of capital "W" wilderness or Wild and Scenic designations but also certainty around other uses (including timber and recreation) that are appropriate to the landscape and for changing conditions not only for climate but perhaps equally as important the changes in population growth and the value of tourism and recreation to our local economies in terms of how it drives impacts on the lands, waters and wildlife.

These are similar values to those embraced by the CGWG, including: "provide for public health, safety and welfare... social and economic benefits to local economies" and represent 'beneficial use by humans.'

2/ Continued protection of inventoried roadless areas. We understand that road densities were one of the criteria in the original watershed assessment that initiated the Hebgen Duck Landscape Assessment.

These are important to maintaining ecological resiliency far beyond just looking at vegetation. Grizzly bears and bison habitat are critical factors in overall ecological health and long term benefits to our public safety and economies.

3/ Increased restoration of fish and wildlife habitats in previous developed front country lands, as measured by declining road densities, improved water quality, reduced sediment loads and greater diversity in forested habitats.

4/ Restoration of fire as a natural process, and decreased risk of uncharacteristic severe wildfire in the WUI. Although all of the sections in the North Hebgén project area were identified as being in the WUI in the Gallatin County Community Wildfire Protection Plan, Tepee Creek was not mentioned in the Landscape Assessment (LA) as an area suggesting treatments. Horse Butte subdivision and Rainbow Campground were. Furthermore, the LA does not mention Tepee Creek under listed escape route/roads.

5/ And finally, GYC looks for a robust and meaningful collaborative public participation in these discussions and decision processes.

GYC has produced an extensive scientific literary review of Forest Restoration Principles and Practices in the GYE that we use to help guide us towards best science in developing comments for projects like this. This has been shared with Earl Atwood.

Whitebark Pine:

It is interesting to note that this is a rare area, perhaps the only, within the region where you can drive to an area of whitebark pine habitat. This provides a unique opportunity to apply best science and further advance our understanding and knowledge of how treatments might impact these areas and we ask that any restoration in whitebark includes robust monitoring and adaptive management component.

Aspen:

Just as in whitebark pine systems, site specific design, implementation and monitoring is a key concept here. The amount of ungulates browsing Horse Butte and the entire area is a critical component to the overall success of aspen regeneration treatments.

Old growth:

GYC remains unclear on the projects proposed forest plan amendment regarding old growth. Need more information.

GRIZZLY BEARS:

GYC work focuses around three concerns regarding grizzly bears:

- 1/ Reducing conflict between humans and bears
- 2/ Protecting Corridors – allowing bears room to roam as they are prone to doing
- 3/ Restoring Core Habitat – which further reduces conflict

Road densities are the strongest correlation to secure bear habitat and to increased bear mortality (citations available). It is important to note that most of this area falls under the Forest Plan Management Area 13 (MA13) which is for “Forested, occupied grizzly bear habitat.” Timber harvest is allowed only if the level is compatible with “management (of) vegetation to provide habitat necessary to recover the grizzly bear.”

Bison:

The impacts to bison habitat is of great concern to GYC. This is not my area of expertise so I did not provide additional comments.

Migration Corridors:

Bison, elk and big horn all have recorded migration corridors in areas that will be affected by this project. Particularly the cougar and duck creek areas and fir ridge. Restoration in of itself may not effect migration corridors but the timing of the work and the impacts on secure habitat may.

Fisheries:

Our comments here focus on Tepee Creek drainage and Red Canyon creek on the north side of the project area. Road densities, water quality and protecting the ongoing investments for trout habitat are our priorities.

Weeds:

Weeds are perhaps our biggest concern. The LA indicates numerous weed vectors already existing where they are proposing the temp roads. There is little to no comment on how weeds will be managed, either prior to project implementation, during, nor after.

Just as the prevailing weather would blow fire in Tepee creek and fir ridge into the park and undeveloped areas it would carry weeds from horse butte and around highway 191 directly into the park, of course dispersion by wildlife could be a significant factor.

Cumulative Impacts:

As the only organization focused solely on the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem for the past 30+ years, GYC is very aware and sensitive to the cumulative impacts of this project with past and future projects in the area. This may include the private developments, the Lonesome Wood fuels project and future projects on the South Plateau and Taylor Fork.

Horse Butte:

Finally important to recognize the value and unique character of Horse Butte. To homeowners, proximity to YNP, wildlife habitat for grizzly bears and bison, unique bitterbrush habitat, to the recreation economy and tourism draw of the area.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Josephson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Joe Josephson, Montana Conservation Associate

Greater Yellowstone Coalition

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