

Custer-Gallatin Working Group (CGWG)

Meeting MINUTES

Wednesday, December 11, 2019

Gallatin County Courthouse, Community Room (3rd Floor)
Bozeman, MT

Time	Topic	Lead	Outcomes																						
	Opening and introductions; Review Agenda, Meeting materials	Prinkki	Welcome, introductions, agenda reviewed																						
<p>Meeting opened by Chairman John Prinkki. Members and guests were introduced. Attendance as follows:</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">John Prinkki</td> <td style="width: 50%;">Mary Erickson USFS</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Dominique Woodham</td> <td>Jason Brey USFS</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hilary Eisen</td> <td>Corey Lewellen USFS</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Joe Skinner</td> <td>Dan Stusek (Sen Daines)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Steve Caldwell</td> <td>Don Bachman</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Kerry White</td> <td>Steve Kimball DNRC</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Jim Hart</td> <td>Richard Lyon</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Colin Cooney</td> <td>John Durnal (Sen Daines)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Jackie Walden (by proxy)</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Jeff Schmidt (by Proxy)</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Earl Atwood</td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p>Corey Lewellen presented a video commemorating recent awards given by the Regional Forester's office to highlight partnerships with regional collaboratives in support of successful projects, which included the Custer Gallatin Working Group in regard to the North Hebgen project. Mr. Lewellan presented Chairman John Prinkki and Commissioner Joe Skinner with tokens of appreciation on behalf of the Region and CGNF.</p>				John Prinkki	Mary Erickson USFS	Dominique Woodham	Jason Brey USFS	Hilary Eisen	Corey Lewellen USFS	Joe Skinner	Dan Stusek (Sen Daines)	Steve Caldwell	Don Bachman	Kerry White	Steve Kimball DNRC	Jim Hart	Richard Lyon	Colin Cooney	John Durnal (Sen Daines)	Jackie Walden (by proxy)		Jeff Schmidt (by Proxy)		Earl Atwood	
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	Consent Agenda: Past Minutes and Financial report/disbursements	Prinkki/Atwood	Vote on consent agenda items																						
<p>Approval of consent list (minutes from September 2020 meeting) was deferred due to lack of quorum. Later in the meeting additional members arrived constituting quorum. Steve Caldwell moved approval, seconded by Joe Skinner. APPROVED</p>																									
	Membership applications	Prinkki/Atwood	Review any new membership applications																						
<p>No new member applications at this time.</p>																									
	Report on Montana Forest Action Committee priorities	Schmidt/ Warden	Update on MFAC recent events, priorities and actions																						
<p>The MFAC meeting is being held this date, and both Darcie Warden and Jeff Schmidt are attending that meeting, so their update will be given at the next CGWG. Previous minutes from MFAC were distributed to CGWG members via email prior to today's meeting.</p>																									
	Increase Workforce Capacity; Congressional visits	Hart, Skinner, Cestero, Eisen, others	Report on visits to our Congressionals																						

Hillary Eisen reported that members of the Working Group met with Tester Erik Nylund from Sen. Tester’s office, and Sen. Daines. In the meeting with Mr. Nylund they talked about the workforce capacity issue and the letter/op-ed issued by CGWG supporting the project. They also discussed the report presented to the Working Group by FS retirees and CGWG concerns with workforce capacity. Mr. Nylund observed that the issues appeared to be focused on timber production, however our members explained that while that is a good place to start; our concerns run deeper than that as the workforce capacity include more ability to complete NEPA, address issues related to public access, recreation and protection of WUI lands including non-timber industries. Nylund indicated it would be difficult to direct more resources to the FS unless it was requested directly by the agency. He suggested the important action would be to assist them in identifying problems at the local level and which projects or efforts would make the case for addition resources to the agency. Since the data offered by the Forest Service retirees was at a national level, Hilary asked Supervisor Erickson if the CGNF could assist by providing data from a Forest level to help us refine our message. Nylund also suggested that the Forest Service should be encouraged to be more outspoken in their resource requests (budgeting) even if they are not optimistic about receiving the additional funds, and the Working Group can assist with messaging on the public side. Kerry White attended the meeting with Senator Daines and observed there is a big push right now to increase the pace and scale of restoration projects, and it would be very important to get local voices involved to assist the FS in drawing attention to these needs. More specifics are needed regarding projects and deficient skillsets, as well as historical attrition in key skillsets within the FS. Kerry White reported that he has requested and anticipates receiving additional data relevant to Montana forests to assist with that research.

Custer Gallatin Forest Team Report

Mary Erickson and staff

Updates; dialog with CGWG concerning new projects and priorities going forward.

Mary Erickson led a team discussion regarding current and planned projects.

Smith Shields: this project was awarded to RY Timber – about 85% complete and expected to be completed in the coming year. This project was litigated, with the FS prevailing in the first round, so the sale was not held up further. The case was appealed and is now in federal court in the 9th District. It may be that most of the work on the ground will be completed by the time of decision.

North Hebgren: a court hearing was held on November 21st – they are waiting for ruling. Three sales with the project are on hold pending rulings.

North Bridgers: This contract was awarded but is also in litigation. Final briefs are due in January 2020 – may be able to contract again in June 2020, depending on rulings. John Prinkki confirmed that attorney K. D. Feeback has been retained by CGWG to develop an amicus brief in support of the project.

Given our next meeting will be after the due date for briefs, he requested member approval for Prinkki and Hart to review and approve work, and to authorize payment for services if needed prior to next member meeting. Kerry White moved, seconded by Steve Caldwell to authorize John Prinkki and Jim Hart to take administrative actions as needed on the brief. APPROVED

Discussion on CGWG involvement in new CGNF projects

Prinkki/Atwood

Future CGNF projects that the CGWG would engage in

Hilary Eisen reported that the new Atlas of the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness has been released, and is for available for sale at the County Bookshelf in Bozeman, Elk River Books in Livingston and Timber Trails in Red Lodge. This is a narrative atlas with great information and perspective on the A-B Wilderness.

Mary Erickson offered and update on Forest Plan revision status. They are on track with the schedule, with briefings scheduled in DC with the Chief’s Office in February, hoping to have the plan ‘out on the

street’ at about the same time. Their goal is to get the EIS out with a 60 day objection period sometime in March. By rule, objections will be resolved at the Regional Forester level. A decision on the final plan that considers all objections is expected by late winter in 2020.

New projects that should be reviewed and considered from their five year forecast of timber sales or restoration projects by CGWG for engagement include: (refer to Erickson handout)

Bozeman Watershed FY2020: a continuation of the project initiated in 2010, which is now ready to move forward. This contract could be quite significant and very high profile from a community awareness standpoint.

East Boulder Stewardship Contract FY2020: Same vintage as Bozeman Watershed, this project was also tied up in the Cottonwood case litigation (lynx), is now ready to go forward after going back to fish and wildlife to cover original concerns over process.

Three Mile Project (Ashland) FY2021: Ponderosa pine sale

Greater Red Lodge Area FY2021: Renewed effort after supplemental EIS was required by litigation
Helicopter Units from Bozeman Watershed Project FY2021:

In FY2022 we will begin to see projects coming out that don’t have decisions in place yet (no litigation), which would include **South Plateau, South Otter Project** (landscape scale ponderosa pine).

In FY2023 Stillwater landscape scale restoration project, a project out of **South Plateau** and one out of **South Otter**.

In FY2024 **Cooke City, Gallatin River East, Mission Face**

The above reflects a menu of projects the collaborative can consider for engagement, and also consider whether there are other priorities to be recommended, realizing this would require displacement of currently planned work.

Kerry White asked Supv. Erickson to address the desire for increased pace and scale on forest treatment in the context of the projects listed, noting that the listed projects did not appear to be increasing the amount of CGNF timber sales and restoration acres compared with prior year averages. In response she pointed to two factors. One being the budgetary and work force capacity available at present, which would not support an immediate and significant increase of effort, and also that the targets are set in the context of regional activity which would include other forests making up the pod in which CGNF targets are established. Targets for other forests in the POD may include projects that are of increased scale within the planning period.

John requested that members review this information and consider which projects contain elements that would warrant CGWG engagement, keeping in mind that we need to consider both near term projects as well as those that are being considered for out years. Subcommittees will be created for any that meet this criteria. Members exchanged ideas about how to go about selecting projects for engagement, with agreement to take the discussion up again at next meeting after an opportunity to consider options. Considerations might include the maturity of a project with regard to litigation, opportunities to provide additional education to the public, potential impacts on opportunity for industry, WUI protection, forest restoration and public recreation.

Establish committees for selected CGNF projects	Prinkki	Select projects and subcommittee members
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Deferred to March meeting, after members conclude on project selection.

CGWG Meeting schedule	Prinkki / Atwood	Confirm change to quarterly meetings, set next meeting date
Next meeting will be on March 11, 2020.		
Remaining items from members....		Announcements, requests or general information.....
<p>Kerry White requested support for the Helena Lewis and Clark and the in their bid for grant funds from the national CFLRP program. Similar proposal has also been submitted by the Bitterroot forest. The grant proposal focuses on increasing FS capacity and provides and opportunity for demonstrated mutual support among collaboratives. Kerry moved, seconded by Steve Caldwell, to have CGWG polled for approval to sign onto a support letter with other organizations in support of the grant request. The letter would need to be sent in short order, therefore the votes would be taken by electronic survey to insure the inclusion of members not present today. APPROVED</p>		

Meeting adjourned at 3:45 pm.