

## **Rangeland Resources Committee**

**2:00 pm**

**Tuesday September 3rd, 2019**

**Upper Musselshell Conservation District Office**

**809 2nd Ave NW, Harlowton, MT 59036**

Present John Hollenback, Steve Hedstrom, Diane Ahlgren, Connie Iversen, Noel Keogh, Stacey Barta- Rangeland Resources Program Coordinator, Karl Christians- DNRC Conservation District Bureau Specialist, Mark Bostrom- DNRC Conservation and Resource Development Division Administrator, Brady Allred- U of M Rangeland Analysis Platform, Kirt Walstad- NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist, Floyd Thompson- BLM Rangeland Management Specialist, Rick Northrup- FWP Habitat Bureau Chief, Carole Hollenback, Betty Hedstrom, Michelle Lockhart- Rangeland Resources Program Intern

Meeting called to order at 2:00 pm.

Minutes were reviewed, a correction was noted (incorrect spelling of GLCI on the 2nd to last page), corrected May minutes were approved.

**Brady Allred, U of M Rangeland Analysis Platform-** Brady introduced the Rangeland Analysis Platform, a computer program for monitoring rangeland plant composition percentages via satellite imagery. The platform splits composition percentages from 0 to 100% between five categories: annual forbs/grasses, perennial forbs/grasses, shrubs, bare ground, and trees. The Rangeland Analysis Platform monitors sites at regional and national levels which is important because management decisions are made at these levels. Landowners can also draw polygon lines within the platform to monitor their own property. Brady stressed that the platform is not perfect, can only provide estimates, and should be supplemented by individual on-the-ground monitoring. The Rangeland Analysis Platform can be accessed via <http://rangelands.app>

**Mark Bostrom, DNRC CARDD Administrator-** Mark explained that Stacey and the Rangeland Resources Program is moving out of the Conservation District Bureau (CDB)

to be its own independent program within the Conservation Resource Development Division (CARDD). Stacey will also be relocated to a new office in Bozeman. Mark then discussed the RRC's budget of \$700,000 and recommended that some of this money be loaned out or used to pay staff. Diane mentioned that the money could be entered into a trust, but Mark said that the trust would not be big enough to fund itself. The RRC decided to postpone deciding on the budget until the Strategic Planning Meeting in December.

**Range Camp Future-** Range Camp was canceled for this year, 2019. Stacey stated that the camp is competing with other FFA and 4-H camps and should be moved to the 1st week in August. Connie asked if the camp could be incorporated with a current 4-H camp. John wanted to increase scholarships for youth to attend and advertisement through the Conservation Districts. The RRC discussed how Range Camp is supposed to prepare kids for Range Days, but Range Days is too early in the summer. Perhaps scholarships from Range Days can be used to boost Range Camp attendance later in the summer. Mark wondered if the Renewable Resources Grant and Loan Program through the DNRC could be used to fund scholarships. The current date and time for Range Camp 2020 is August 3rd-6th at the C-Bar N Ranch along the Dearborn River.

**Range Forum 2020-** Currently the forum is held in mid-May, but Stacey mentioned that the forum should be moved to late May to avoid scheduling conflicts. The RRC was asked to consider topics and speakers for the next forum. Some topics and speakers listed by the committee included:

- Cole Mannix with Western Landowners Alliance
- Gabe Brown on Soil Health
- John Weir on Prescribed Burning
- Fire Control
- Conifer Encroachment
- Agricultural Research Service (ARS)

**Leopold Conservation Award-** Montana received six applications for the first year of the Leopold Conservation Award. The top three finalists are to be announced at the Montana Range Tour Reception Dinner and the final winner will be announced at the Farm Bureau Annual Convention in Billings during the month of November. The judges

panel for the award includes executive directors, state and federal employees, and academic leaders.

**Range Improvement Loan Program-** There are currently no new applicants for the Range Improvement Loan Program. The current interest rate is set at 1.5%.

**Strategic Planning Meeting Date-** The upcoming Strategic Planning Meeting for the RRC will cover programmatic changes within DNRC and changes to the budget. The meeting is planned to convene with Stockgrowers Association meeting for December 11th-13th. The Strategic Planning Meeting will be scheduled sometime around these dates, the second week in December, in Billings, MT.

**Section 8 MOU-** The Section 8 MOU has left the Forest Service with signatures and is on its way to Stacey, Rangeland Resources Program Coordinator. DNRC directors are scheduled to sign on Friday. RRC members should talk about the Section 8 MOU at upcoming Conservation District meetings to help get the word out about the MOU. Grass commissions and local agencies should also be included in the conversation.

**Working Lands Intern Program-** Stacey reported that the two interns learned a lot and had a great time! The ranch hosts also enjoyed having the interns. The interns provided feedback that a 2-week stay at each host was long enough to learn without feeling like they were over-staying. The RRC wondered if the internship could count toward an NRCS pathway job in the future or be further funded by NRCS organizations. Stacey is hoping to have three interns for next summer, 2020.

MACD- Steve reported that the upcoming State Technical Advisory Meeting does not include range and that the RRC should ask to have range added. The MACD convention and area meeting is coming up. The MACD currently has no executive director and there is still discussion about whether the MACD and SWCDM will rejoin.

GLCI- John reported that the GLCI Report has been challenged to include an increased scope of work for the agreement and increased educational programs. There is a steering committee meeting in two weeks to discuss the agreement and another coordinator is to be hired.

BLM- Floyd reported that the BLM is in the process of rewriting its grazing regulations. Any changes will go through a lengthy public process. There has been a new executive director hired from North Dakota with a background in oil and gas. There are range positions open, applications are being received and reviewed.

NRCS- Kirt reported that Montana Focus Conservation is in the process of drafting long-range plans to identify resource concerns within individual counties to be funded.

FWP- Rick reported that current incentives to promote cropland conversion back into grassland have been hit or miss. Rick would like recommendations from the RRC for how to promote keeping rangelands as rangelands in Montana.

CDs- Karl reported that all vacant positions within the conservation districts have been filled and that things are operating smoothly.

Meeting Adjourned at 5:00 pm

#### Acronyms Defined

RRC- Rangeland Resources Committee

GLCI- Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative

MACD- Montana Association of Conservation Districts

SWCDM- Soil & Water Conservation Districts of Montana

CD- Conservation District

BLM- Bureau of Land Management

FWP- Fish, Wildlife and Parks

DNRC- Department of Natural Resources & Conservation

NRCS- Natural Resource Conservation Service