

**Rangeland Resources Committee**  
**8:30 AM | Friday, April 23, 2021**  
**Zoom Virtual Meeting - Minutes**

**Members Present:**

Diane Ahlgren  
John Hollenback  
Jim Anderson  
Ron Devlin  
Sigurd Jenson  
Noel Keogh  
Leah Lewis

**Absent: None**

**Staff Present:**

Stacey Barta, Rangeland Resources Program State Coordinator  
Carolyn Sime, Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program Manager  
Shawna Swanz, Administrative Attachment Coordinator

**Public Present:**

Steve Hedstrom, former RRC member  
Floyd Thompson, BLM  
Shawn Heinert, Forest Service  
Kelvin Johnson (for Rick Northrup), FWP  
Raylee Honeycutt, Montana Stockgrowers Association

**Meeting called to order at 8:30 a.m.**

Sigurd moved to approve August 17, 2020 minutes; Diane seconded. Motion Carried.

***Welcome, Introductions, Reports:***

**Diane Alghren - Returning member.** Diane and her husband Skip ranch in Garfield and Petroleum Counties. Some BLM allotment, state lands, some ground in core and general sage grouse habitat. Transitioning part of the ranch to family members. Big topic in Petroleum County is a BLM ranch acquisition in the lower Musselshell River with a promise to continue in grazing. Pulls 11,000 acres out of tax base. Weather is dry. Drought report continues to expand. Hoping for fewer grasshoppers this year.

**Sigurd Jensen – Returning member.** Primarily private ranch near Flathead Lake, state timberland. Big news is status of Plum Creek Timber/Weyerhaeuser. They are shutting everything down. Wondering what happens if that is all gone. There is recreation in the area so watching the influx of people and what costs are going to do in the next several months.

**John Hollenback – Returning member.** Committee member for many years. Run cattle in Gold Creek, MT, with forest permit and private grazing. Started ranch management right out of high school at age 17.

**Ron Devlin - New member.** Rancher from Terry, MT, due north of Miles City, in Prairie County. Mixture of private, BLM, and some state sections. Fourth generation rancher. Nephews will probably be fifth generation. Primarily a cattle ranch with a little bit of farming. Used to also have sheep but sold in 1900s due to coyotes. Work in Helena as a lobbyist during legislative sessions; since 2005. Have several clients. Northwestern Energy is primary client. Lived in eastern Montana entire life. Will send picture and bio to Stacey.

**Leah Lewis – New member.** Live outside of Boulder, MT—Compton Ranch. 350 mother cows and yearlings. Also, summer about 200 head at Loring, MT, at grandparent’s homestead. Fifth generation rancher. Work and graze under state lease, BLM leases at both Boulder and Loring, CRP grazing rotation at Loring, three forest service permits on two different forests. Worked at Forest Service for 10 years as an invasive species coordinator on the B Bar D. Transitioning ranch ownership from dad.

**Jim Anderson – New member.** From the *Dry-Line*. Hoping to get back to the *Hi-Line* again when we get more precipitation and have the irrigation system working properly. First generation. Purchased ranch in 1995. Have added several contiguous properties over the years. Base operation, small federal allotment, lease a larger property at the headwaters of the Upper Missouri River Monument, also lease a ranch in the Bear Paw Mountains. Recently joined the Montana Association of Realtors and have an interest in an insurance agency and multiple rentals around the state of Montana to diversify the agriculture income to stabilize the ranch as it grows. A year ago, a nephew joined the operation so he can possibly transition the ranch to another generation. Grew up on a ranch in the Milk River valley that is still in the family. Degrees in Ag and Business.

**Stacey Barta – State Coordinator, Rangeland Resource Program.** Hired as State Coordinator in 2015. Also worked for a private ranch, NRCS, Forest Service in college, MT Department of Agriculture and for a county office. MSU graduate in Range Science.

**Steve Hedstrom** – Long time former RRC member. Staying in touch with committee members.

**Floyd Thompson – Advisory Committee, BLM.** Range and Soils Program Lead for the Montana-Dakotas BLM state office. Tracy Stone Manning has been announced as nominee for new BLM director. Dealing with drought across the region.

**Kelvin Johnson – Advisory Committee, FWP.** In Habitat Bureau for eight years, worked as management biologist for the state and block management coordinator. Raised on a farm in Medicine Lake, Dagmar, Reserve community. Attending this meeting on behalf of Rick Northup, FWP Habitat Bureau Chief.

**Shawn Heinert – Advisory Council, Forest Service Regional and Range Program Lead.** Hired in 2019. Drought top of mind. Focused on getting prepared for grazing season/permitees in a virtual world.

**Carolyn Sime – Program Manager for the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program.**

Wildlife background. Sheep history, cattle, settled in Gallatin Valley. Lead and coordinate efforts to keep Sage Grouse off the endangered species list. Program ramped up in 2013. Coordinate Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team (MSGOT) of which the RRC appoints a member. Report to Direct Kaster. Program administratively attached to DNRC. MSGOT is administratively attached to the Governor's Office. Important need to have private landowner perspectives included in MSGOT deliberations especially for habitat and grants.

**Raylee Honeycutt – Advisory Council, Director of Natural Resources for Montana Stockgrowers Association.**

Also serve as executive staff for Public Land Grazers. Work with Montana Association of State Grazing Districts along with the Montana Public Land Council in a staff compacity. Started August 2020 in this new to position. Grazing Districts are the contract holder for the Montana Grass Commission through the Rangeland Resource Program.

**Shawna Swanz – Ranchland Resources Staff Support.** New to the program. Grew up on a ranch in Utica, MT. Have background in sales and marketing.

***State Coordinator Updates:***

**Montana Youth Range Camp**

July 26-29, 2021. C Bar N Ranch, Augusta, MT. Lewis & Clark Conservation District will co-host. Stacey noted that the camp may take a pause this year. Need 20 youth to register. Registration deadline May 15 to give facility notice if must cancel. Bigger discussion at May 24 face-to-face RRC meeting. Camp competes with Montana Range Days, 4-H events, sports camps, etc.

**Montana Range Tour**

September 8-9, 2021. Malta, MT. Same agenda, same speakers as was planned for 2020. RRC meeting scheduled for afternoon of September 7, 2021. Leopold Conservation Award winner announced evening of September 8 as well as give recognition to the 2020 winner. Only virtual recognition and announcement last year.

**406 Forum**

May 25-26, 2021. Big Horn Resort, Billings, MT. Working with GLCI to help plan event. Karen Budd-Fallon and panel (including Jeff Mosely from Extension) to discuss 30 x 30. Direction Kaster invited to provide opening remarks; haven't heard back.

**2021 Leopold Conservation Award Winner Tour**

Tentatively scheduled for June 24, C Lazy J Livestock, Malta, MT.

### **Rangeland Improvement Loan Program (RILP) ARMS**

- New RILP Administrative Rules are now published. Background: DNRC was directed in 1983 by the Legislature to create rules for RILP which is also part of the statute for the Rangeland Resources Act. There has been internal guidance, but no official rules.
- An RILP webinar on role and responsibility of conservation districts in the loan application process is scheduled for April 28. Zoom recording will be available on the website.
- Two loan applications in-house and one awarded in 2020. Interest in the loan program is picking up.
- Current loans outstanding = \$250,959. Balance on account = \$530,753. Total in RILP = \$781,712. Less than 2020.
- Waiting on information from fiscal about the total RILP balance. Believe it should keep minimum \$1,000,000 balance.

### ***New Business:***

#### **MSGOT Appointment**

- It is in statute that MSGOT will have a landowner representative. Diane was the initial RRC member.
- John nominated Diane Ahlgren to continue on MSGOT. Sigurd seconded the nomination. Motion Carried.
- Diane noted, that as an MSGOT member, she will continue with her discussions on term vs. perpetual easements.

#### **30 x 30 Initiative**

- Consider as a point of discussion for upcoming meetings. Lots of discussion around the issue and potential impact on private landowners in the ranching community.
- Diane recommends staying aware and encouraging a positive influence. Asked for comments.
- **Shawn Heinert:** Forest Service continues to learn about 30x30 and what it means for the agency. Anticipate providing emphasis on the positive aspects of range management-- considering it is more than just trees. There are many things the Forest Service can showcase in terms of climate change, resiliency, soil carbon storage, etc. of rangelands and grasslands. Will keep the committee updated.
- **Raylee Honeycutt:** After calls with federal agencies this week, the agencies, too, are working on learning more about the initiative and what direction will be considered. From MT Stockgrowers standpoint, at a very high level, a concern is acquisition. The 30 percent referred to in the initiative equates to 440,000,000 acres of land in the US. Question is, will that be through acquisitions or management programs that are already in existence? Question on what does "innovative solutions" mean. Also, how multiple use fits into the program. Definition of "natural state" is unclear when talking about conserving and biodiversity. Will keep the committee updated.

### **Rangeland Awareness Month Resolution**

Declare June as Rangeland Awareness Month. Stacey is in support of moving forward with the declaration.

The Rangeland Awareness Month resolution process started with the RRC in 2009. Judith Basin Conservation District put forth the resolution to the Montana Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) so it could be adopted into the MACD policy book. It passed MACD but stalled during the Schweitzer administration.

Shawna will look into the process and report back at next meeting.

Jim moved to proceed on action to declare June as Rangeland Awareness Month. Ron seconded. Motion Carried.

### **Public Comment**

None

### **Meeting Adjournment**

Leah moved to adjourn. Ron seconded.

Discussion: RCC is not statutorily required to hold meetings. Primarily schedule meetings as needed. Typically meet face-to-face twice a year. Meeting may be schedule for strategic planning, etc. A monthly "update" zoom call is scheduled with the committee.

Next meeting May 24 in Billings at the Big Horn Resort. Watch for agenda.

Motion Carried.

**Meeting Adjourned. 9:35 a.m.**