

Rangeland Resources Committee
8:00 AM
Monday, August 17, 2020
Zoom Virtual Meeting

Present:

Diane Ahlgren

Steve Hedstrom

John Hollenback

Connie Iverson

Sigurd Jenson

Noel Keogh

Stacey Barta, Rangeland Resources Program Coordinator

Mark Bostrom, DNRC Conservation and Resource Development Division Administrator

Shawna Swanz, Administrative Attachment Coordinator

Absent: None

Meeting called to order at 8:03 a.m.

Noel moved to approve September 3, 2019, minutes, Diane 2nd, MC.

New administrative attachment coordinator, Shawna Swanz, introduced herself to the committee.

Stacey Barta provided the following Event updates:

Montana Youth Range Camp

Cancelled for 2020 due to COVID-19. Postponed until end of July 2021, C Bar N Ranch, Augusta, MT. Lewis & Clark Conservation District will co-host. Stacey noted that the camp may have to be reworked if participation does not increase. Lake County CD is scheduled for co-host in 2022.

Montana Range Tour

Postponed to September 8-9, 2021 due to COVID-19. Program will be in Malta and trying to keep the same agenda, same speakers as was planned for 2020.

406 Forum

Due to COVID-19 the 406 forum is re-scheduled for Billings in 2021. The program will be similar to what was started for 2020 with NRCS and GLCI. Stacey reported she will have a date set in the next couple weeks and asked to send her any speaker suggestions.

Rangelands in the Rotunda

The event will be March 11, 2021 (depending on COVID-19 situation).

Shawna is looking into Winter Grazing Seminar on March 10 at the Delta Hotel in Helena, the day prior to Rotunda Day. Stacey is considering Dr. Frank Mitloehner, climate change spokesman for the livestock industry out of UC Berkley in California, as a keynote speaker with additional speakers on the agenda.

2020 Leopold Conservation Award

Stacey is working with Sand County and the film company on a way to virtually announce with subsequent announcements at 2021 events, including 2021 Range Tour. Stacey is also considering reaching out to Lane Norlund to help with a virtual presentation and public announcement. Stacey also reported that she will sit in on some of the other state's that are doing virtual presentations. Stacey is waiting for information from the Governor's office so she can provide a press release.

Other updates:

RILP ARMS

Stacey reported that a copy of the draft Administrative Rules regarding RILP were sent to this committee. DNRC legal review has been completed with the final draft updates now on Director Tubb's desk.

The Public Hearing is set for October 6 in Helena but will most likely be virtual. Stacey is designated as the hearing officer and will keep this committee informed on the status and format of the meeting. Stacey and Mark invited participation either in person or virtually by any committee member who is interested.

Stacey reported it takes about six months from start to finish to complete proposed rules, so the rules will most likely be finalized and ready to put before the legislature in January.

Mark noted that the proposed rules are needed to bring the program into compliance with the statute.

MEPA

Mark reported that he, Stacey and Autumn Coleman have met to discuss the need for projects to be reviewed for MEPA code compliance. He reported and Stacey concurred that as long as there were no more than four applications a year, the Rangeland Resource Coordinator could conduct the MEPA review. More than four applications may require additional resources. A Programmatic EIS may also be considered in the future, if needed.

Stacey recommended to update the current Loan Application form and application guidelines to be more streamlined and efficient as possible. She also suggested a site visit could be part of the application review and would also be good PR for the program.

Boyce Application

Stacey reported the Boyce RILP application brought to light the MEPA question/concern due to her knowledge of the Boyce property and the possibility that their project may be in Sage Grouse habitat. On behalf of the Boyce's, Stacey sent the information to the Sage Grouse program for DCT and she is hopeful that it will be determined that there is almost zero disturbance. Stacey will continue to monitor the application.

Allestad Application

Stacey reported this application is with the Valley Conservation District. She reported that she has not seen the application, but that after discussion with the CD district board chair, it seems that the funds the Allestad's are asking for would go toward a solar project that would allow for savings that would then be delegated to rangeland improvements on the property.

The committee briefly discussed that a loan for an indirect rangeland project would probably not be approved.

Stacey reported that a concern with this application is the amount of time it has been in review. Stacey suggested additional changes to the application process that would include the application be presented to her and the conservation district at the same time so review could happen concurrently.

Other

Finance & Legislative Report

Mark reported that he submitted, and it was been approved by the Department; and will now go to the Legislature for approval for the Rangeland Resource Program to have its own budget with allocation from the Resource Indemnity Trust (interest from bonds and oil and gas taxes) and from the Natural Resource Conservation Fund in an effort to move Conservation Districts budget from the current dependence on Coal Severance Tax dollars.

Public Relations Videos

Steve reported he will continue his research into the resources and processes the South Dakota Grazing Lands Coalition uses to produce their short monthly videos.

Meeting Schedule

Stacey recommended a monthly virtual meeting with the committee agreeing it would be a good idea. Stacey will send out meeting invite with Zoom instructions for a meeting in September.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:43 a.m.