

Rangeland Resources Committee
Meeting Minutes
Monday, May 24, 2021, 3 pm
Big Horn Resort Conference Room
1801 Majestic Ln, Billings, MT

Present: Sigurd Jensen, Ron Devlin, Diane Ahlgren, John Hollenback, Jim Anderson (via zoom), Stacey Barta- Rangeland Resource Program Coordinator, Gillian Rowe, and Shawna Swanz

Meeting called to order at 3 pm.

Minutes were reviewed. Diane noted a correction. John motioned to approve the corrected April minutes, Sigurd 2nd, mc.

Welcome, introductions and Member Reports - Diane introduced herself and her ranch's new intern. She also mentions that Carolyn, the administrator for the state sage grouse program is leaving. Floyd Thompson introduced himself as the range program lead for BLM. Ron Devlin introduced himself as a new member of the board and a rancher from Terry, MT. Sigurd Jensen introduced himself as rancher up on the Flathead and states things are dry. John Hollenback introduced himself as a rancher and lifelong member. Stacey Barta introduced herself as the State Rangeland Coordinator and Gillian Rowe introduced herself, she is shared MCC intern with the Rangeland program and Gallatin CD.

Office move - Stacey updated everyone on how she plans to move offices again because she is moving to the Shields Valley. They are exploring options.

Budget update - Stacey updated everyone that an official budget finally passed. While she does not have numbers, yet she hopes this meeting will help the board prioritize events and programs to see where we need to allocate funds. This is the first time the Range program in DNRC has its own official budget separate from the rest.

Monthly report - Stacey filled in the new members that she tries to send out a monthly report that highlights activities and things that have gone on that month. Members mention how they like this report because it keeps them in the loop on what is going on.

Advisory member update - Floyd updated everyone that he hasn't heard if they have had a hearing for the director nominee (back in DC). He is unsure where the office will be going forward. He says the range staff that was in Washington is all in Boise Idaho now and that they have a full staff now. Next, he mentioned that there are two new field managers in MT, Lindsay Babcock in

Butte and Eric Carrie in Missoula, that started in the beginning of the year. There also are new range specialists in places like Miles City, Butte, Helena, and Lewistown. There are still some positions to fill as it takes a long time. He then moved on to discuss the drought. They are currently using permits to get through the drought which he mentions has been successful in the past. They are also suggesting different rangeland management options to conserve water. As for grasshoppers, they are working on treatments and hoping to see improvements compared to last year. There is also a need to spray on BLM. The American Prairie Reserve office is still working. The original proposal has been scaled down to 6 allotments, where it was originally 19. The report may be released in June, but he is unsure. Once it is drafted there will be a 60-day comment period with public meetings. On the national level there was the regulations rewrite that was started in the last administration. They completed a draft environmental impact statement and a proposed rule package last September which has been stalled and is still in limbo. For the Missoula and Lewistown Resource Management Plans there was a lawsuit over them saying the last acting director did not have authority to sign them. As for Sage grouse they're implementing sage grouse conditions under existing plans. Finally, the permits renewals which are the #1 priority in range program in MT and the Dakotas are a little less than 75% fully processed. He still wants to get up to 85-90% processed.

Grasshopper Presentation - Gary Adams presented on the USDA grasshopper program. His agency focuses on species that affect plants. This program started back in the dustbowl era. Unfortunately, there is no budget for the program yet. Some other states do currently have budgets for the program. Last year in MT they did suppress more acres than previous years. Last year they protected 500,000 acres. They only work where they are requested to. He says unless you are really looking for the grasshoppers, you won't see them since they are very small. Therefore, many people don't think they have an issue with them. His program will only get involved if there is 10,000 continuous acres of rangeland. This program does the contracting and surveying and then cost shares back to the private landowner. Their methods include using antigrwth insecticide that impact the young life staged grasshoppers which means you must spray at a certain time. The goal is to reduce grasshoppers to a lower level we can live with, but they don't want to eradicate the grasshoppers entirely because they are still a part of a food web in nature. He mentions that there is some push back from other groups that are worried that the methods used will hurt important wild pollinators. Another important point he makes is that if you stop the program on BLM then you essentially stop it everywhere, because it's hard to get 10,000 acres of private land together. He ends his talk by asking for someone (a rancher we know) to join him to speak on the impacts of grasshoppers on their land - as a primary example to prove the importance of his program.

PIO Training - Stacey updated the group that she has completed public information officer training for DNRC. She did it because it was interesting to her and she is familiar with the areas in Eastern Montana where she would be stationed. She thought this would be good for the program because fire impacts rangelands. She will be able to bring her work with her if she is called out.

Range Tour - Stacey updated the group on the progress of range tour. There is a tentative draft agenda in our packets for September 8-9th. The RRC meeting will be the afternoon of the 7th in Malta. Phillips CD and RSA put the tour agenda together and it is highly recommended that we all go. We will announce the 2021 Leopold winner at the dinner on Wednesday night. The 2020 winner, who is from Malta, will also get recognition since last year the announcement had to be made virtually. The Eventbrite for range tour is up now. Stacey will try and find a place for the meeting on the afternoon of the 7th as well as a place for dinner.

2020 Leopold winner tour - The tour is June 24th in Malta. The tour for last year's winner is by invite only. It is targeted at the final selection committee, sponsors, and potential sponsors. Funding is going well as far as Stacey knows. Stacey says that Sand county takes care of all funding. Sometimes Stacey will send potential sponsors their way, but she tries her best to stay out of asking people for money as a state employee. The Sand County Foundation holds a large program meeting every other year and this year the event will be the first week of August in Steamboat Colorado. NRCS still remains to be a big partner and sponsor. They pay for the videos and much of the PR.

Rangeland month in June - Stacey has not moved anything else forward since the last meeting via zoom. One way to do it is through a general proclamation that goes through the governor's office. Shawna explained how they worked with director Kaster through Montana Invasive Species for National Invasive Species Awareness Week. The noxious weed group went through the legislature with a bill and got it through into law. Shawna believes that the proclamation must be done every year. The committee agrees that this is something we should continue to work on. May not be feasible to ask for a whole month for this year given that it is almost June. We may need to do a proclamation for a week instead (ex - rangeland appreciation week - working title).

Range loan principal balance - Stacey described how we have old minutes or notes that gave history on the program and how it went through legislation and money (circa 1980 in a binder). It also gives loan history from the first loan (1979) to the most current one. In 1979 they did 22 loans in one year. In 81 they did 50 applications. So, in the past it was used a lot due to high interest rates. Stacey emailed Mark Bostrom on questions we had from the last zoom meeting and from several years ago on the declining balance of the loan. The email exchange is in packet. Based on the email responses, it looks like the director's office is appropriated out of the range fund for their operations. You

can find a copy of the spending history for the directors' office and for card dating back to 2000. It is suggested we have a meeting with Trisha (Fiscal person in central services) and Anna (DNRC's card fiscal person) to see if we can get more information about where the money is going for the director's office and card and who gave that authority. Personal services in the documents means wages. Stacey thinks that all or one committee members to join in zoom or in person. Diane believes that the more committee members we have participate in this meeting the better. John suggests we hold the meeting in person for the best conversation. Ron believes that having large groups can put people on the defensive. He suggests at this introductory meeting we should have a smaller group that comes with questions that represents the boards views. We could then follow up after this initial meeting. Diane suggests that everyone should get questions to Stacey so that our representatives can cover all points. Ron and John (as the historian) should join and give two weeks + advance notice to meeting date. Shawna took all the hand typed three ring binder's worth of information from the committee that was in Stacey's office and scanning and organizing these, so they are in a digital format.

Range Camp - Stacey described that as of last week we only officially had 2 people registered. 4 kids from John's area and 2 from Flathead that said they were interested. Stacey brings up that part of this discussion should be to define what the minimum number for range camp should be. Stacey believes that given the amount of time instructors must spend we need at least 20 kids to make it worth everybody's time. Camp is the most expensive event this program has done. Even with the kid's fees and grant money we receive it is still expensive to put on (costs about \$10,000 for the program). Stacey explains how Range Camp does compete with Range Days. From a parent's perspective, Range Days are logistically easier to figure out with family's schedules. It is also shorter and cheaper for them to participate in. Range Camp Also competes with 4H Fairs and sports camps. Stacey is looking for input from the committee on what to do going forward. Should we make minimum at 20? If we don't make that minimum, do we put the program on pause and adjust what we want to do going forward? We can change up what we are doing for Range Camp or we can directly support Range Days instead for example. Stacey describes how the number of participants in the program have been declining since it started in 2016. 2019 and 2020 Range Camps were canceled. Diane explains how in the past we have talked before about helping with range days. She was wondering if we had any specifics on what this would look like. Gary Olsen said that we could be a state sponsor for Range Days. Stacey believes we could sponsor both the local and state committees. Noel describes how Range Days is also struggling getting participants, particularly school aged kids, there. The program needs more PR. Noel suggests, based on experience, that we can offer scholarships to youth to pay their tuition for Range Days as an idea to entice kids and their families to go. Stacey suggests that we should take a pause on camp for a while and support other events and maybe there is an opportunity to continue in the future or maybe it is done. Ron makes the

motion to pause youth camp activities for 2021 and revisit it for 2022. Sigurd seconds the motion. Motion carried. Another suggestion is that we could push to add more range information at the Youth Natural Resources Camp.

Committee Member delegation of duties - Diane brought this up to Stacey as an idea. She suggests that each committee member could be delegated a topic to focus on and inform the group. Examples for topics include forest service grazing issues, BLM, Amscot, GLCI, endangered species, Montana Association of Conservation etc. Stacey would send the point person information on their assigned topic and discuss what is going on and then bring the summarized bullet points to the full committee. John believes this would help us cover a broader range of topics that affect rangelands which is important for the committee. Ron asks if we can put together a list of areas that we are in and see if the committee members backgrounds match topics. We can make a list and people can volunteer for topics to cover.

Other items off the agenda - Stacey suggests that we think about the programs that we do and make sure that we are all on the same page in prioritizing the programs. These include the Working Lands Inter Program, Range Tour, Range Camp, a Range Forum and Range days at the rotunda. While this is prioritized in the strategic plan, given we have new members on the board now we need to make sure we are all still on the same page. This helps direct the budget and spending. Diane was wondering if all new members have access to the strategic plan. Stacey should send Ron and Jim a notebook for all the range stuff. New members should look through the strategic plan, especially section 8 and the monitoring partnerships.

Public comment - Noel sending his appreciation for being allowed to join the meeting and serve on the board

Meeting Adjourned at 5:09 pm.

Acronyms Defined:

RRC- Rangeland Resources Committee

GLCI-Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative

MSGOT-Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team

MACD-Montana Association of Conservation Districts

BLM- Bureau of Land Management

MDA- Montana Department of Agriculture

FWP-Fish, Wildlife and Parks

MRCDC- Missouri River Conservation Districts Council

SWCDM-Soil & Water Conservation Districts of Montana

NRCS-Natural Resource Conservation Service

DNRC- Department of Natural Resources & Conservation

DRAFT