

SESSION NOTES

SESSION NAME: How and Why of Partnering with the Forest Service

DAY & TIME: 11/19

SPEAKER #1 NAME: Jeff Burrows

MAJOR POINTS:

- Must participate in the NEPA and planning process in order to have standing during an objections process for something like travel planning.
- Started monthly informal coffee meetings with the rangers to discuss projects, things happening in the valley, fire updates during the summer, etc. Have a good working relationship now.
- Have a better understanding of when they want to be involved – early and often – they the Forest Service includes them on all notifications.

SPEAKER #2 NAME: Eric Winthers

MAJOR POINTS:

- District Ranger, Darby RD, Bitterroot National Forest
- Previously worked in Wyoming, where there were a lot of oil and gas and grazing issues.
- Building trust and respect is key – that’s how you work together.
- Follow-through and persistence is also important.

SPEAKER #3 NAME: Lisa Stoeffler

MAJOR POINTS:

- District Ranger on the Bozeman RD for >7 years
- Theme she’s heard from other rangers is that they’re working hard to build relationships with county commissioners in an informal way (coffee, conversations, informal meetings)
- Don’t have an expectation that counties will blindly endorse everything a Forest does; goal is just to have honest discussions and respectfully disagree
- Don’t let litigation (“getting sued”) be the bellwether of whether or not a project was successful.

- Story: Works with county to plow Hyalite Canyon road – everyone sits down to discuss what resources they could bring to the table.
- Story: County official asked Lisa if a YNP plan to contain a fire would work well or not. It was a lesson – the county trusted the FS; the FS and county would never have been in the same position.

SPEAKER #4 NAME: Joe Skinner

MAJOR POINTS:

- You get things done by building relationships, and that only happens over time. It doesn't happen during one meeting. Over time you begin to see those representatives as people and friends. That groundwork is key when you run into conflicts.
- Important to engage the Forest Service at every level. In Gallatin County they meet with the Forest Service at least twice/year. They talk about everything that's important to them. The Forest Service also updates the County Commission on other stuff that's happening, even if it doesn't affect the county (because the FS recognizing the commissioners are going to get questions and they need to be informed).
- Working through a collaborative process is also important to introduce commissioners to all staff (not just the rangers).
- Story: Gallatin NF recently banned all shooting in Hyalite Canyon. It's very controversial and commissioners may disagree with FS. Luckily Lisa called all the commissioners ahead of time and made sure they knew it was coming. Knowledge is power – they understand the issue now so they're a tiny bit more likely to support it or develop a creative solution.

Note: two different people took notes on this session. As expected they each heard things slightly differently. Both are included. See below for the 2nd set of notes.

SESSION NOTES

SESSION NAME: ADDRESSING CRITICAL NEEDS: THE WHY AND HOW OF PARTNERING WITH USFS

DAY & TIME: OCT 19/4PM

SPEAKER #1 NAME: JEFF BURROWS

MAJOR POINTS:

County commissioners wanted to become involved with Bitterroot travel plan in 2012. County Commissioners did not have standing however. Seven years into travel plan update too late to become engaged. Turnover in Commissioners during that 7-year period helped create the missed opportunity because you must engage early on to achieve standing. This missed opportunity demonstrated the need to have ongoing dialogue between county and USFS.

Now holding monthly informal meetings with rangers to stay abreast of developments. Weekly fire updates during the season.

County aiming to get more involved with existing collaborative on the forest and Commissioners getting notice of processes taking place on the forest as well.

LESSONS/BIG TAKEAWAYS:

Stay engaged with USFS personnel, especially local rangers and forest supervisor, on a regular basis.

SPEAKER #2 NAME: ERIC WINTHERS

MAJOR POINTS:

- Building trust key. Need to take the time and invest in communications.
- Schedule field tours as needed to see the terrain together.
- Follow through, results needed and persistence.
- Sideboards need to be considered and set forth early on by USFS even if desire is to be ground up
- USFS can aim to incorporate county land use plans into forest plans if they are made aware of them.
- Collaborative group can be a vehicle for all these goals.
- County commissioners can be ally in helping USFS meet its goals and vice versa.

LESSONS/BIG TAKEAWAYS:

Build trust and relationships to facilitate and strengthen collaboration, information sharing and positive results.

SPEAKER #3 NAME: LISA STOEFFLER

MAJOR POINTS:

- All district rangers should be working informally to improve relationships with county commissioners across the board in Montana.
- Building trust key through informal meetings.
- Respectful disagreements expected.
- Should not be political fodder for each other.

- Better decisions with dialogue and partnerships and better chance of success.
- Partnership work still a good investment and can lead to success even if litigation and it may help to have allies in litigation.
- Collaborating on county plowing of forest service road (13 miles) to allow public to access winter recreation assets. Non-profit in place that supports recreation allowed forest service to provide funding.
- Yellowstone fires began to impact county and federal forest. NPS does not have the same level of relationships with locals as forest does. County officials relied on USFS to validate NPS approach to fire response. Showed value of relationships that USFS and county have built.

LESSONS/BIG TAKEAWAYS:

Build trust and relationships!

SPEAKER #4 NAME: JOE SKINNER

MAJOR POINTS:

- Building relationships and taking the time key to the trust level needed
- County officials should engage at every level with USFS
- Allows commissioners to respond to constituent requests for information
- Get to know rangers and all USFS staff. Can ask the hard questions when necessary.

- Temporary shooting ban likely to become permanent. USFS outreach to all commissioners in advance of announcements critical. Serious public backlash otherwise.
- Relationship does not require agreement but allows subsequent discussions to reach mutually agreeable solutions.
- Support USFS when you can and it helps build local support.

LESSONS/BIG TAKEAWAYS:

Good Neighbor tool from the Farm Bill could be one way to repay counties for work they can do on federal land from snow plowing and weeds to fuels work.

North Hebgen project and collaborative was used as a forum to hear from a range of experts on grizzly bears, wildlife road crossings and other controversial topics. Collaborative had a different position it wanted USFS to take and working through the collaborative got USFS to be responsive.