

Matt Arno's Summit Summary

- Senator Jon Tester Opened the Summit with a comment I think we can all agree on, “We have to get folks back to work in the woods”.
- Bob Harrington summed up DNRC’s work through the Forests in Focus program pretty well. The State of Montana is focusing on the tools, energy, and funding that we have right now to get more work done on the ground. DNRC is working with a sense of urgency and continues to work with the USFS to get more done.
- The opening panel discussion explored the history of the Montana and National Coalition of Forest Counties focusing exclusively on PILT and SRS payments versus the Coalitions expanding their focus to include advocating for forest management. This panel produced a lively, productive discussion. It seems to me in the end most commissioners agreed the Coalition could and should do both.
- Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell took numerous questions from the group including one about the challenges the agency faces with litigation. He acknowledged that region one has more than its fair share of lawsuits.
- Moving forward, there may be opportunities to use some of the techniques that Chris Marklund (from NACo) talked about to engage in litigation reform measures and for local governments to work more directly with Montana’s Congressional delegation. The notes from Chris Marklund’s presentation also include a link to NACo’s Election Analysis.
- The Litigation and Objection Panel garnered a lot of good questions and discussion during the second day of the Summit. It was interesting to hear a broad spectrum of expertise on this topic from representatives of the USFS, DNRC, The Wilderness Society and Lincoln County. It clearly showed that there are strategies to work together to support good projects that are facing objections and litigation. I think it was particularly interesting to have The Wilderness Society talk about supporting a Forest Service restoration project that included a significant amount of wood products.
- Commissioners shared examples of successful and not so successful county engagement in federal land management. These examples spurred discussions about what is working well and what can be improved in the future. Ravalli County Commissioner Jeff Burrows and Darby District Ranger Eric Winthers discussed the efforts they have taken to improve their working relationship. Jeff pointed out the importance of staying engaged using the example of Ravalli County losing its standing by failing to comment on Travel Planning.
- We had really good feedback from the open space discussions. I know the one about Cooperating Agency Status helped me understand that process better. A lot of other good discussions occurred; we will keep this format in future meetings.
- I was surprised about the amount of positive feedback we got immediately following the Summit. Some of that feedback included suggestions of having another one. I would like to

hear from more of you now that some time has passed. I am tentatively thinking about planning another Summit in the spring of 2018.

- My biggest take away from the Summit fits with what I have been hearing and seeing over the last ten months. There were discussions about the different ways that counties can collaborate effectively and foster productive relationships with the Forest Service. An outcome of these discussions is each county and Forest can find what works best for them, some are obtaining cooperating agency status, others have formed or joined collaborative groups , others meet quarterly. The key is regular communication of some kind is necessary to have a productive working relationship. It takes time to build good relationships and trust.