

SESSION NOTES

SESSION NAME: Understanding and Participating in NEPA & Project Planning

DAY & TIME: Oct. 19, 2016 1:15-2:00

SPEAKER #1 NAME:

- Chris Partyka

MAJOR POINTS:

- NEPA is a complex, and at times trying, process, but is necessary to our work
- NEPA = Magna Carta of environmental law
- Two goals of NEPA
 - Informed decisions
 - Citizen involvement
- Ultimate NEPA Outcomes
 - Good work on the ground
 - Benefits to the public
- NEPA does not require the decision-maker to make the environmentally favorable alternative
- A big complexity: other environmental review requirements that are incorporated into the NEPA process (e.g. Endangered Species Act is implicated if the project involves critical habitat, which triggers the consultation process)

LESSONS/BIG TAKEAWAYS:

- NEPA is not broken, just everything that goes along with it (i.e. all the complexities that surround the process, legal decisions, etc)
 - The intensity of passions surrounding projects subject to the process is a great example. That's not something NEPA

generates, but represents a great opportunity for us to work together.

- Know the legal sideboards during the Proposal phase of a project (statutes, regs, and the relevant forest plan)
 - This shows what the USFS can and can't do for you, and saves a lot of grief in advance
- When to get involved with NEPA:
 - Project Development
 - Scoping (THIS MAY BE THE MOST IMPORTANT PLACE TO BE INVOLVED)
 - Comment Periods
 - Objection Process
- Effective Involvement:
 - Get involved early, and stick with it.
 - Understand the decision space available within the legal context of the project
 - Work together to manage expectations
 - Recognize that NEPA is complex and time consuming

REFERENCED MATERIALS:

- NEPA Collaboration/Stakeholder Participation Benchmarks (Printed handout)
- [See NEPA Power Point Presentation](#)

SPEAKER #2 NAME:

- Leonard Wortman

MAJOR POINTS:

- Important to have an accurate and updated Growth Policy
 - Shows USFS what life is like in our counties

- Is a member of Beaverhead-Deerlodge Working Group, and it wasn't always easy in the early days of the group, but has improved greatly in the last few years.

LESSONS/BIG TAKEAWAYS:

- Collaborative Groups are the future
 - Especially the place-based legislation that can be generated as a result
- Counties should get involved early and often

SPEAKER #3 NAME:

- Clint Kolarich

MAJOR POINTS:

- Being open minded and not jumping to conclusions is a huge key to success in the collaborative process
- Another aid to success is leading collaboration with the context of what USFS can or cannot do
 - Helps filter out, in the beginning, where the Service can't go
- Recognize that a lot of the USFS folks are scientists first, and are being asked to operate in an environment that they are not comfortable with (when it comes to public collaboration)

LESSONS/BIG TAKEAWAYS:

- Pre-NEPA collaboration is a huge help to the Service (Project Development and Proposal phases)
- Collaboration in NEPA has a lot of potential

REFERENCED MATERIALS:

- Collaboration Process for the Upper Sheep Creek Vegetation Project (printed handout)

FULL DISCUSSION – MAJOR POINTS

- There are opportunities to add capacity during the NEPA process (in the form of contractors) that help speed the process up.
Downside: it's very expensive
- If County Commissioners ought to have Forest Plan on their desks, then Forest Supervisors ought to have County Policies on their desks