



MONTANA GRASS CONSERVATION COMMISSION

P.O. Box 622 • Terry, Montana 59349

Montana Grass Conservation Commission

Zoom Meeting Agenda

June 28th, 2024 - 1:00 p.m.

Call to Order – Chairman, Richard Stuker

- A. Minutes from Montana Grass Conservation Commission previous meeting on April 10th, 2024, Zoom. – Action Item **Public Comment**
- B. Approval of funds for mapping project in conjunction with Montana State Library. – Action Item **Public Comment**
- C. Montana Grass Conservation Commission budget update. – Action Item – **Public Comment**
- D. Any other business that comes before the Montana Grass Conservation Commission Board. – **Public Comment**



Montana Grass Conservation Commission Zoom Meeting April 10, 2024.

Call to order 12:00 p.m. by Chairman Richard Stucker

Commissioners present: Richard Stucker, Travis Brown, Craig French, Audra Ortega, Sigrid Pugrud.

Others present: Lieutenant Governor Kristen Juras, DNRC Director Amanda Kaster, Montana Association of State Grazing Districts Chairman Kevin Elias, Director, DNRC Personnel, Shantell Martin, Mark Bostrom, Rachael Green, Lawyer from the Lund Law Firm Peter Taylor, Senator Mike Lang, Nathan Descheemaeker, Assistant Budget Director Ryan Evans

A. Approval of Minutes from December 21st, 2023 – Terry MT, Montana Grass Conservation Commission.

Minutes from the December 21st, 2023 meeting were reviewed and approved.

Audra Ortega moved to approve minutes as read, Craig French seconded the motion, motion passed.

There was no discussion or public comment.

B. Elect Vice Chairman for the Montana Grass Conservation Commission.

Craig French was nominated for Vice Chairman.

Chairman Richard Stucker called for a unanimous ballot be cast for Craig French to be Vice Chairman of the Montana Grass Conservation Commission.

Audra Ortega moved to cast a unanimous ballot for Commissioner Craig French to be Vice Chairman of the Montana Grass Conservation Commission, Sig Pugrud seconded the motion, motion passed.

There was no public comment.

C. Solicit Attorney General Opinion.

Chairman Richard Stucker opened the discussion and gave background information on the issue of soliciting an Attorney General's opinion on the following issues brought forth by the Montana Association of State Grazing Districts Board of Directors. There are different perspectives on these issues that have been brought forth therefore the following questions have been asked.

1. Whether MGCC has authority to coordinate and interact with federal agencies on behalf of state grazing resources and interests.
2. Whether MGCC has jurisdiction over grass and range resources and management beyond the boundaries of state grazing districts.
3. Whether MGCC has authority to retain staff.

Kevin Elias from the Montana Association of State Grazing Districts gave his perspective on why they felt an Attorney General's opinion was needed. Kevin wants to be sure that the voices in the State Grazing districts are heard and the concerns are addressed.

Chairman Richard Stuker said in a conversation with the Lieutenant Governor there is a possibility of having a seat at the table with the Governors Natural Resource policy board committee that convenes once a month and addresses issues brought forth by stakeholders from across the state. The Montana Grass Conservation Commission could bring issues to the committee that it feels need addressing.

Lieutenant Governor Juras outlined the processes that the executive branch follows and said that Governor Gianforte is very process oriented.

Lieutenant Governor Juras said that consistency is very important in making comments and each agency should be cognizant of that. A Natural Resource Committee of the State Agencies convenes once a month to address issues that come up in the state. This ensures that consistent comments are coming out that are not contrary to the Governors position.

Lieutenant Governor Juras said they would welcome the Montana Grass Conservation Commission on the Natural Resource Committee and they would be a part of the process and have their concerns heard.

Lieutenant Governor Juras asked the Montana Grass Conservation Commission if they would consider delaying their letter to the Attorney General. This would allow time for the process outlined with participation in the Natural Resource Committee to address concerns the Montana Grass Conservation Commission has had.

Chairman Richard Stuker called for public comment.

Montana Association of State Grazing Districts Chairman Kevin Elias said if the Montana Grass Conservation Commission has a seat at the table and is not stifled, he has no problem tabling the Attorney General's Opinion at this time.

DNRC Director Amanda Kaster clarified how DNRC works with the governor's office and the process of becoming a Cooperating Agency in Federal Rule making. Director Kaster said she is the point of contact with the governor's office and to reach out to her with any concerns, questions, or issues.

Craig French moved to table the letter to the Attorney General's office. Audra Ortega seconded the motion, motion passed.

D. Fink Transfers from Indian Butte Cooperative State Grazing District.

Chairman Richard Stuker asked Secretary Sandra K. Brown to explain the transfers and to give background information as to why the commission approves them.

Craig French said he felt that if the attorney went through the transfers and did not see any reason to not approve them, the commission should approve the transfers.

Craig French moved to approve the transfers, Travis Brown seconded the motion, motion passed four to one.

There was no public comment.

E. Proposed Procurement qualifications for Montana Grass Conservation Commission Projects.

Chairman Richard Stuker updated the commissioners on the procurement process and how it ties in with the following items.

1. Uniform policy framework for counties and State Grazing Districts.
2. TGA Reserved Grazing Districts and Herding Districts (Maps, Legal Descriptions, and Purpose).
3. Demarcation of LU Lands from Public Domain Lands (Maps, Description and Purpose).

Richard went on to explain that former Montana Grass Conservation Commissioner Nathan Descheemaeker had taken the lead on this project and had meetings scheduled with the state library to discuss the mapping part of this project. Funds have already been secured for this project during the last legislative session. State legislators were very interested in the mapping and want to see this project completed. Chairman Stuker asked the commission if they would like to proceed with the mapping part of the 3 items as he feels that this is the most important part.

Sig Pugrud made a motion to continue with the mapping project with the understanding that Chairman Richard Stuker take the lead on the project and meet with the state library personnel, Craig French seconded the motion, motion passed.

Mark Bostrom from DNRC talked about the budget and the procurement process and displayed a breakdown of what has been used and what he estimates will be left at the end of the fiscal year. Mark said that the money needs to be allocated by the end of the fiscal year, so it is not lost.

Commissioner Craig French asked the question “what is the difference between a contractor and an employee?” Mark Bostrom from DNRC and Lieutenant Governor Juras explained the difference to the Commissioners.

Lieutenant Governor Juras asked Ryan Evans of the budget office to weigh in on what process might need to be followed to spend the rest of the money on the mapping projects.

Ryan Evans from the budget office gave the Grass Commission Board a rundown of how the state budget process works and what must be done before the end of the fiscal year. He said the commission was right on track from what he sees and hears is being done and praised everyone for opening the lines of communication between all entities. Chairman Richard Stuker asked the question on how or if its possible to encumber the money on a project so that it is not lost before the end of the fiscal year. Ryan said there is an accrual process, and the details must be worked out.

Lieutenant Governor Juras said the 25 / 26 legislative session will be coming up soon, so the commission needs to be planning and thinking of projects.

Chairman Stuker tabled the Uniform Policy Framework for Counties and State Grazing Districts to be revisited later.

No public comment.

F. New lead person to represent Montana Grass Conservation Commission for Cooperative Agencies MOU's.

The Montana Grass Conservation Commission is a cooperating agency on the following Memorandum of Understanding with the Bureau of Land Management.

1. Utility Scale Solar Energy Development on Public Lands.
2. Amending Resource Management Plans for the Greater Sage Grouse.
3. Updating regulations for Grazing exclusive of Alaska.

Former Grass Commissioner Nathan Descheemaeker was the lead on the MOU's. Governor Gianforte has appointed new commissioners to the Grass Commission Board; therefore, a new lead must be appointed to represent the Montana Grass Commission on the proposed changes to the MOU's.

Chairman Richard Stuker asked the Montana Grass Conservation Commission Commissioners if any one of them would like to step up and be the representative on these projects. Commissioner Audra Ortega said she would be interested in being the representative. Chairman Richard Stuker appointed Commissioner Ortega to be the representative on these projects. Commissioner Ortega will coordinate with Director Amanda Kaster from DNRC to be brought up to speed on what has transpired to date and the deadlines that are coming on the projects.

Commissioner French asked if there is the possibility of grazing lands being taken out of production with utility scale solar energy on public lands. Lieutenant Governor Juras and DNRC Director Kaster gave their administration's position on this topic.

There was no public comment.

G. Budget for Montana Grass Conservation Commission – Earmarked Money.

Chairman Richard Stuker clarified the need for earmarked money in the budget process and will work with Mark Bostrom from DNRC to encumber the money for the Montana Grass Conservation Commission end of fiscal year budget.

No public comment.

H. Identify any new Legislative Issues.

Chairman Richard Stuker explained to the commission that DNRC is calling for any new proposals that they might have going into the next legislative session. Chairman Stuker said to be thinking about it and he will put it on the next meeting agenda.

No public comment.

I. Evaluation Process for Montana Grass Conservation Commission Executive Secretary

Chairman Richard Stuker explained the evaluation process and is working with DNRC to come up with a form to send to the Commissioners to comment on. The evaluation process will tentatively be done in October. DNRC Director Amanda Kaster explained the program called Talent that the state uses for evaluations and said she would help with whatever the commission needs for support.

There was no public comment.

J. Montana Grass Conservation Commission Executive Secretary Report.

Executive Secretary Sandra K. Brown updated the Montana Grass Conservation Commission board of Commissioners and the public on her activities from the last regular board meeting.

No public comment.

K. Public Comment or any other business that comes before the Montana Grass Conservation Commission Board.

There was no public comment or any other business that came before the Montana Grass Conservation Commission.

Richard Stuker moved to adjourn the meeting, Audra Ortega seconded the motion, motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 1:57 p.m.

Chairman, Richard Stuker