

RANGELAND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MINUTES

Tuesday August 1, 2023

9:00 AM-10:00 AM

Virtual via Zoom

PRESENT

Members:

Chair Diane Ahlgren
Member Leah Lewis
Member Sigurd Jensen
Advisory Member, Marisa Sather
Advisory Member, Raylee Honeycutt
Advisory Member, Kevin Derzopf
Advisory Member, Mark Bostrom
Advisory Member, Smith Wells
Advisory Member, Becca Boslough
Advisory Member, Reyer Rens

Staff:

Stacey Barta, DNRC State Rangeland Resources Program Coordinator
Shantell Frame-Martin, DNRC Rangeland Resource Program Specialist

Public:

Connie Iverson, Rancher
Alex Rasmussen, WLIP Intern

Call to Order

Chair Diane Ahlgren called the meeting to order at 9:02 am. Everyone in attendance virtually introduced themselves.

New Business

Stacey provided an update on events in June and July. There were 40 people present at the Leopold Conservation Award event, and 90+ people for the Montana Range Tour both in the Paradise Valley. The 2024 LCA and Tour will be held the last 2 weeks in June outside of Stanford, MT. Stacey will be meeting with the Governor next week and touring Barney Creek Livestock as he wasn't able to attend MRT. Stacey attended NRCS state technical rangelands/grasslands advisory committee meeting where there were 30 people in attendance. Still working on the grass conservation commission contract amendment and Stacey also took the interns to her cabin in the mountains and taught them about forest health and fire ecology. Shantell's update included attending MRT, LCA events and a Carnivore Conflict Resolution Workshop in Missoula along with assisting with the newsletter and other logistical background updates. Kevin commented that he attended MRT and thought that the event went very well and that he liked how MRT was combined with touring the LCA winner of the previous year; he thought it was a great success and Diane concurred those sentiments. Diane asked Stacey to highlight the 406 Grazing

Academy and the GLCI Kicking Grass Tour. Diane asked Stacey to talk about the grazing MOU; Stacey noted that it is signed, in place and will be put on the website. So that is good for another 5 years. Diane asked for a budget highlight and Stacey deferred to Mark to provide that update. Mark noted that nothing is set on paper yet, things are getting set and the budget process will move forward. Mark noted that he will put together a personal services and operational budget for the grassland and range programs; he expects a budget the end of August, things are moving slow due to Fiscal Services being shorthanded. Mark also pointed out that DNRC received money from the Legislature for the Working Lands Improvement Program so that will not come out of operating funds, it's its own separate pool of money now.

Diane asked for committee updates. Sigurd noted that all Western Montana is on fire, Leah mentioned that the flies are terrible this year and that they are trying garlic salt blocks and then Leah posed the question to Smith about the Conservation Permits that FWP has implemented this year; a discussion ensued. Diane mentioned in her update that her and Skip are finally moved to Grass Range and that the grasshoppers are bad where they live.

Diane asked Stacey to help with advisory committee members:

Reyer- BLM; Reyer said that he is keeping an eye on the drought conditions across the state, especially the northeastern corner of the state. The BLM is keeping an eye on the grasshopper situation in various parts of the state and he mentioned that they are very short handed and they are working on getting the job announcements out to advertise those positions.

Marisa- Partners for Fish & Wildlife; did not have an update from the USFWS however she noted that she is serving on a state conservation team and if anyone has concerns, she's happy to bring them up to that committee.

Becca- MACD providing support for local offices to host their annual fall meetings in September, she mentioned the annual meeting in November 14-16 in Billings.

MACD has a new staff person, Patty Larson who is in charge of organizing events and conventions. MACD also had a successful legislative session, HB 321 created a trust for conservation districts in the tune of 100 million dollars that will be filled in the next 5-6 years.

Kevin- NRCS; working on CRP and grassland CRP. He noted that forage production across the state this year is outstanding and in some places transects are 2-4 times what it normally is. Kevin also mentioned that he is on the SRM awards committee and if anyone would like to nominate, he will send that information out to everyone shortly.

Mark- DNRC; a new conservation commission was formed for the west slope of Montana and they're trying to fill the appointed seats for that right now and they're having trouble finding a private citizen who is a member of an irrigation district or water users association somewhere on the west slope, so Mark asked if anyone has suggestions to pass their name along. Mark also mentioned the sage grouse mitigation system and a stakeholder group for a new granting process for a new stakeholder group for non-source point pollution.

Raylee- Stockgrowers; DNRC comprehensive water review, Raylee was chosen to represent on comprehensive water review and represent stock water/irrigation so if anyone has any concerns, she's the contact. She just returned from national

cattleman's beef association summer meeting and there's a lot of talk about cattle inventory, prices are good, but inventory is down. as well as cell cultured chicken which was just approved for human consumption and beef isn't far behind. National Public Lands Council meeting in Oregon Sept 5-7, Stockgrowers Annual Convention is December 6-8 in Billings.

Smith- FWP; has a new director, Dustin Temple. Smith outlined the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) which is for watershed noxious weed management grant program that promotes native habitat for wildlife while controlling noxious weeds. Most programs have been in Western/SW Montana, and they would like to get a few more projects going in the Eastern part of MT. Up to 10% of the grant can be used for administration and monitoring. FWP is also implementing the use of virtual fencing collars for the Spotted Dog WMA. FWP also has a new habitat conservation lease program and there were 120,000 acres that people applied for the program for; there will be another call for applications this winter so be on the lookout for that opportunity.

MSGOT- Diane asked for a new nominee for the MSGOT committee; Diane mentioned that she would like a RRC member to fill her position on this committee and that she would like to discuss at the October RRC meeting in Boulder. It's in statute that it must be a member of the RRC.

Connie thanked Stacey for sponsoring the Ladies Day on the Range in her area, it was a well-attended event and the monitoring kits that were donated were very well received.

Working Lands Internship Program- Stacey outlined the difficulties that have been experienced by the interns/hosts this summer. She posed the question of 2 weeks versus 3 weeks. Stacey posed the questions of limiting the applications to Montana college students only, do background checks on interns and have an in-person meeting with hosts to debrief after the summer, and an online survey method for evaluation. She then opened the discussion up to the group. The consensus was that background checks are not needed as Stacey does a great job vetting the students prior to being hired. The idea of a 3-week stay provides a lot more opportunity for them to learn more things as it takes a few days to teach someone ranch tasks, so a longer time makes more sense. Four weeks may be a bit much, 3 weeks seems more manageable however the expense of an intern may be a concern for some hosts. Stacey mentioned doing a SurveyMonkey survey to poll those that have hosted to get a feel for the timeline of hosting and a survey gives anonymity for hosts to give honest answers to build and change the program. Stacey also mentioned doing a host check-in meeting; should that event be in-person or be virtual? The survey will help hammer that out, Shantell and Stacey will work on this. Connie also mentioned including past interns to get their take on possible changes. Discussion changed to limiting to Montana schools; Stacey noted that several of this year's intern candidates were not able to attend the safety training that she puts on. Logistically out of state students have a harder time getting to MT in time to start the internship and attend the safety training, so the idea is to possibly prioritize Montana schools for applicants.

Other-

Diane mentioned the October 17-18 Fall Meeting in Boulder. Please put on your calendar!

Public Comment- no public comment.

ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 10:20 a.m.

DRAFT