

**CMR NWR Community Working Group  
Meeting Minutes for February 19, 2015  
Fort Peck Interpretive Center, Fort Peck, MT**

Bill Milton called the meeting to order at 10:10 am with introductions and grounding question and 56 people in attendance.

*Grounding Question:* What word comes to mind when you hear the word “conflict”?

Answers consisted of: Communication, Avoidance, Compromise, Aversion, Anticipation, Opportunity, Relationships, Persevere, Misunderstanding, Challenge, Buffalo, Uninformed, Opportunity, negations, Common ground, High blood pressure, Avoid, Destruction, Story, Challenging, Collaboration, Knowledge, Resolve, Conquer, Transparency, Listen, Honest, Understanding, Sharing information, Resolution, Solutions, Transparency, Honesty, Unproductive, Resolving, Not easy, Action

Paul Santavy – Provided a short bio to the group and his reasons for coming back to Montana. He has wanted to be a refuge manager since he was a freshman in high school. He is glad to be back in Montana and anticipates finishing out his career as the CMR NWR manager.

Bill asked everyone to describe who they represented and why they were part of the CMR Community Working Group.

Answers consisted of: Community, conflict resolution, CCP plan implementation, CMR mission, preserving the wildlife and the landscape, bringing in the urban interests, care about agencies and landowners that are partnered together, partnerships and collaboration amongst the partners, Community- being engaged with communities and partners, gaining knowledge and information sharing amongst partners, local knowledge being brought in to the CMR and used, Education on different mindsets, getting along, learn and work and contribute to the community, help coordinate the entire group, help meld what everyone has to offer, working with the local people and making progress, interest in learning what the group has to offer, concerns with changing land uses and keeping the traditional land uses, land management, input to CMR and input from CMR, defend the way of life for many, voice of his peers, help the group, wildlife management and land management needs collaboration, being a part of it, helping and working with their neighbors, stay informed and engaged to do their job better, contribute to the solution, sage grouse issue and the potential implications, what happens on the CMR does not stay on the CMR, listen and learn (most agency personnel), partnerships, and local input.

Bill asked Paul what he heard from that description: Paul heard a diverse set of interests, values, and concerns. Feels that he is very fortunate to be the beneficiary of the work this group has accomplished to date. The question on funding, especially associated with the FWS planner position, was brought up. Paul answered that he recently worked in the regional office and is familiar with the budget. He and the staff are currently working to prioritize resource allocation and he is hopeful that the funding could be in place this year.

Bill mentioned that at the last meeting the group broke into smaller groups and came up with 3 goals for what they want to see in the region.

Bill broke the attendees into 6 groups to address the goals and directed each group to eat lunch together. He then asked the groups to review the goals and suggest changes that they would like to see for each goal. Next, each group was asked to decide on 2 projects/action items for the CMR CWG that they feel are the most important for the next year.

*Group summarizations of goals:*

Each group submitted changes ranging from minor word-smithing, to complete revision of the goals. The suggested revisions are being summarized and will be available on the website in a separate document at a later date.

*2 Most important projects for CMR CWG in 2015:*

Group 1:

1. Engage in a discussion of the economic and social impacts of the introduction of bison to the CMR
2. Look at existing ranches to determine management strategies that complement sage grouse and work to develop whole ranch plans.

Group 2:

1. Expedite and complete the HMPs in the CCP so that permittees and all involved know the playing field.
2. Have the working group make a significant contribution to a sage grouse conservation effort in the 6-county region.

Group 3:

1. Succession planning across all entities.
2. Discuss how to keep public engaged, involved, and informed.

Group 4:

1. Continue range monitoring efforts and education
2. Cooperation and sharing of knowledge through Monitorfest 2 and learning the history of the region from long-time residents and permittees.

Group 5:

1. Encourage youth (FFA, 4-H etc.) and younger ranchers to get involved in this group.
2. Focus on protecting native sagebrush steppe habitat, which is both a public and private issue.

Group 6:

1. Sage grouse plan – CCA, education/outreach, etc.
2. Economic base to support quality of life, define what the role of the group could be in this.

Bill Brought the large group back together after a short break. He then introduced the topic of sage grouse and the potential for this group to coordinate a large-scale conservation effort in the region.

Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAAs) were brought up and Bridget explained that these consist of individual landowner agreements for conservation practices on their private land that if implemented and the animal is listed, would allow the landowner to keep doing business and would protect landowners from penalties and from “take”. No such “assurances” can be offered for public lands.

Paul mentioned that the main obstacle to a CCAA is that an agency or entity needs to sponsor the effort and no one has taken that step in Montana as yet. He corrected some of the information that was put out by others in the group about sage grouse conservation and the major threats to sage grouse identified by the Service. He stated that taking steps to preserve intact sagebrush steppe habitat is a great course of action for the area.

Bill - Is the group ready to take on working on a sage grouse conservation project?

Ann McCauley, Kelsey Malloy, Shilo Messerly, Rick Caquelin, and Carrie Osberg had joined the meeting and were introduced and asked to explain their role in sage grouse conservation (i.e. MACD, SGI, and NRCS)

Rick said that the NRCS has been working with USFWS on predictability, and that an agreement between the agencies was reached a few months ago.

Bridget mentioned that there is not enough time for a CCAA and that she feels the most direct approach is to contact your local NRCS office and work on the predictability program.

Bill asked for volunteers to serve on a subcommittee to begin developing a plan of action for sage grouse (or sage brush steppe) conservation before the next meeting.

***CMR CWG Sage Grouse Working Committee Members:***

Rachel Frost - Missouri River Conservation Districts Council (MRCDC), Coordinator

Bill Milton - Facilitator

Bridget Nielsen - US FWS

Tom Flowers - MT FWP

Geoff Beyersdorf - BLM

Rick Caquelin - NRCS

Kelsey Molloy - Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) Program

Ann McCauley - Montana Association of Conservation Districts (MACD), Program Manager

Diane Ahlgren - Producer, CD Supervisor, Petroleum County

Scott Cassell - Producer, Valley County

Clyde Robinson - Producer, Phillips County