

CMR NWR Community Working Group Meeting Minutes for February 17th, 2011 Memorial Building, Circle, MT.

Attendees:

Terry Selph, Nathan Hawkaluk, Kit Fischer, Sonja Jahrsdoerter, James Knight, Bill Berg, Ken Nelson, Bill Milton, Melissa Hornbein, Casey Coulter, Kyle Fitch, Karl Christians, Larry Nagel, Jeanne Kirkegard, Don Woerner, Mark Good, J.T. Korkow, Clint & Shawn Kirchner, Don Quick, Dave Pippin, Regan Kirchner, Greg Nagel, Mary Jones, Dyrck Van Huning, Laurie Massar, Jenny McCabe, Adam Husbey, Carie Hess, Dean Rogge, Steve Gilpatrick.

The Charles M Russell National Wildlife Refuge (CMR NWR) Community Working Group held the 6th meeting on February 17th, 2011 at the Memorial Building in Circle, Montana with 34 people in attendance (3 failed to sign in). Coffee and doughnuts were available prior to the start of the meeting.

Facilitator Bill Milton opened the meeting at 10:05 a.m. with introductions and the following grounding question: *How do you relate to the following statement – I can understand you without having to agree with you.* The participants were seated in a circle and each person introduced themselves and answered the question in turn.

Milton then reviewed the group's geographic scope, purpose statement, and meeting rules. He then stated that the theme for this meeting was to have a panel discussion on the economics of ranching in the area and how it relates to the CMR and working group. The Planning Committee had invited 3 speakers from different backgrounds to speak.

Steve Gilpatrick, a fourth generation rancher from the Hilger area, was the first to speak; he had a small PowerPoint presentation to go with his talk. He started his talk by stating that his grandfather purchased the original homestead of about 1900 acres in 1934 for \$ 5,000 and in 2004 the family paid the bank note off. They have expanded from the original acreage. They run a cow-calf operation of about 350 head, 250 cows and 100 yearlings. The ranch uses A.I. (artificial insemination) breeding with an Angus – Simmental Lucky Cross and the calves are usually born around March 15. The calves are sold via video sale around the September 15 weighing in at about 500 pounds. They are then shipped to a feedlot in Colorado, slaughtered in Arkansas, and processed in Minnesota. An electronic ear tag program is used with age source verification and MBQA protocol is used to administer vaccinations, thus allowing tracking animals from birth to the table. A 3 pasture rotation grazing system is used in the mountain pastures and a 4 pasture rotation is used at the home site; they follow the Fish and Game protocol and graze about two thirds of their land. Steve noted that by not choosing the same pasture to start in and by conducting weed control measures they have had good success. He also noted that in two of the mountain pastures the cattle are hand lead in and out due to the remoteness. He passed out a handout that he gives hunters who come to the ranch. The ranch allows hunting with the following exceptions; no bow hunting and no members of certain environmental interest groups. They do ask require completing a sign in sheet at the end of each day that asks who you are, where you were hunting, and if you harvested any animals.

James Knight PhD, a Wildlife Specialist and Associate Director at MSU Extension Service Bozeman, was the next to speak. He stated that in his 45 year career he had learned that it is easy to use wildlife to promote an agenda instead of how they are managed. He told the group to put their agenda on the table and not to use wildlife as a scapegoat. He has looked at

various big game animals and the trends they go through as habitat changes, civilization expands and the accompanying misconceptions. He used the examples of elk outcompeting deer and whitetail deer outcompeting mule deer. He stated that changes in grass/forb vegetation communities that change habitat (food) is what drives animal movement; vegetative succession is great for wildlife. He also talked about the changes that rangelands experience when fire (prescription or wild), trampling (buffalo or cattle), and mechanical measures (chiseling or plowing) are introduced. He stated that some of the current standards have created things that are unnatural to the way the land once was. He explained that sage grouse need certain amounts of old growth sagebrush, but that the habitat also needs disturbance to produce habitat for warm season forbs. His final comment was "put your agenda on the table, identify what wildlife you want to work on, and then work together and compromise on the solution."

Casey Coulter, a young fourth generation rancher from Brussett, MT was the final speaker. He started by giving his background and that he left the ranch after high school, went to college in Bozeman, and became an agriculture loan officer in Helena. Coulter recently returned to the family ranch. He explained that just like any small business, family farms and ranches retain only one-third of the numbers in the first and second generations. By the fourth generation only three percent remain. Coulter thought this was due to different factors, 1) farm and ranch kids are used to hard work and therefore succeed in college, quickly become successful, and find it economically unfeasible to return to the ranch; 2) they must be independently wealthy, able to lease land, or have family help to be successful; 3) most families can't agree on how to change a tire let alone how to develop a business plan and run a profitable ranch. He discussed public land grazing leases verses grazing private lands, focusing on benefits and downfalls. He stated that grazing public lands provides ranchers with a needed resource and benefits the public by having someone on the ground able to identify possible threats. Farmers and ranchers on the ground should be bigger players in the decision making on management and planning. He also stated that while public ground is cheaper, by the time one factors in fencing, chasing cattle, loses, and the lower weaning weights, the actual final costs are relatively the same as private leases. He noted that 1.3 million AUM's are harvested by wildlife on public ground. Farmers and ranchers are good at what they do, but if they aren't good land stewards, they won't be sustainable.

Milton then had the group break into smaller groups of 5 to answer the following questions about each speaker.

Q-1) What did you learn from this speaker?

Q-2) What part of the speaker's presentation would you support?

Q-3) What part of the speaker's presentation do you have concerns with or do not support?

The groups were given about 20 – 30 minutes to gather their answers.

The group reconvened to share their thoughts after lunch.

Group Summaries:

1. Group 1:

Q1)

- Steve – has a niche market with his cattle, using pasture rotation.
- Casey – use of public land, although not available to everyone, is not always best deal.
- Jim – that one size doesn't fit all and information on sage grouse habitat.

Q2)

- Steve – all could support the niche he has found.
- Casey – can support that he uses facts to support his information.
- Jim – supports the need to look at the ecosystem not just a part or species.

Q3)

- Steve –comments about not allowing certain groups to hunt.
- Casey – only used his perspective but most did not have enough info to disagree.
- Jim – dangerous to assume there is an agenda with wildlife management.

Final comment “there is more than one side to a round ball.”

2. Group 2:

Q1)

- Steve – total control, electronic ear tag system, birth to table info.
- Casey –noxious weeds, values of lifestyles, good stewards.
- Jim –science vs. agenda.

Q2)

- Steve – family management.
- Casey – family and financial management.
- Jim – for sage grouse need to learn a lot more disease vs. habitat.

Q3)

- Steve –targeting certain groups.
- Casey – why do we identify AUM's.
- Jim – False bison information, are we dealing with cycles.

Final Comment – adaptive-based vs. science – in to most rural communities

3. Group 3:

Q1) adaptive, educated, good managers, benefits of tagging & video sale.

Q2) good stewards of the land, supports the wildlife.

Q3) agree with most important points, but who does the job?

Final Comment – Agriculture is important to wildlife if it is what is good for the land.

4. Group 4:

Q1) oil & gas activities on land & affects, raising cattle is very labor intensive, letter to hunters when they come on the land, knowing the agenda of audience.

Q2) cared about condition of the land, grazing and pasture rotation, managing the land for what works best.

Q3) unlimited predator control, must manage sage grouse habitat, not letting certain groups on to land

Final Comment –

5. Group 5:

Q1)

- Steve – ID tag program, importance of rest rotation.
- Casey – percentage of 4th generation, dynamics of family business, younger generation is looking to come back and stay, why wildlife likes private land.
- Jim – grazing for the benefit of wildlife, agenda needs to be on the table, managing for both is possible.

Q2)

- Steve –rest rotation, need private management to maintain healthy environment, good land steward
- Casey – nobody is getting rich grazing public lands and the hidden costs, thinking about big picture.
- Jim – grazing and wildlife can coexist, can manage for both, you can use any topic to prove a point or push an agenda, good private management can provide habitat.

Q3)

- Steve –Ear tags and how do they reduce risks of rancher accountability when the cow leaves the ranch.
- Casey – NA
- Jim – NA

Final Comment –Ranchers/ private owners have to be accountable because they rely on the land for their livelihood. Any good management/ stewardship requires accountability.

Milton asked the speakers to reflect their thoughts about giving presentations.

Steve stated that it was scary but his talk had gone better than he had expected even though he felt the group did not learn a thing. Jim stated that he enjoyed being there and that the group was very receptive and polite. Casey stated that he enjoyed it but he was unsure if people were listening.

The group then moved on to a short Q & A Session with the speakers.

Steve explained his electronic tagging system and how it works with keeping his operation safe. He also explained why he sells his calf lighter and later and how the net dollars are higher. He stated that his practices pay for themselves; he also stated that the programs he uses are producer-driven not government-driven, which is a common misconception. Jim stated that he was just making a point with examples and was not pointing fingers.

Bill Berg stated that we need to make the best of what we have right now to make it better as we cannot predict the future.

The next meeting agenda was discussed and Kit Fischer was asked to do a presentation on his organization and wildlife. It was also thought that Dennis Jorgensen might like to do a presentation; Dennis was not at the meeting but will be contacted. Bill Berg talked about the new refuge manager, Rick Potts, who will probably not be able to make the April meeting.

In closing Bill Milton asked everyone to state what worked well and what could be done better.

What worked well?

- ❖ Moderating

- ❖ Sharing ideas, thoughts, and listening
- ❖ Break-out groups
- ❖ Having presenters
- ❖ Set up- being in a circle
- ❖ Using building blocks to add to each meeting
- ❖ Value getting a lot out of it

What could be improved?

- ❖ Big group = hard to handle
- ❖ Getting a grip on subjects (themes of meeting)
- ❖ How easy it deviates from purpose
- ❖ More Q & A with presenters after presentations

The next meeting date was announced as April 14th in Jordan.

The group adjourned at approximately 2:40 pm.