

Meeting Minutes for CMR Community Working Group Meeting
Thursday, February 27, 2014
MTFWP Building, Lewistown, MT

Attendees: Joe Gibson, Stan Benes, Terry Selph, John Chase, Rick Potts, Sue Fitzgerald, Diane Ahlgren, Tara Ostler, Monty Billing, Sonia Smith, Bill Berg, Katie Decker, Randy Matchet, Matt DeRosier, Dean Rogge, Dennis Jorgenson, Dan Brunkhorst, Dyrck Van Hynning, Arnie Dood, Ron Moody, Kit Fisher, Jenifer Anderson, Jason Holt, Mark Good, Damian Austin, Clyde Robinson, Cameron Sapp, Bridget Nielson, Bill Milton, and Rachel Frost..

Facilitator Bill Milton opened the meeting up at 10:10 am by asking people in attendance to introduce themselves, state who they represent, and answer the grounding question – What is the role of this group? Most answered that it was to find common ground, build relationships, implement CCP, and facilitate communication.

Bill mentioned that there are 5 major dysfunctions of a team: Lack of trust is the most important one. Without trust, there is no progress or outcome.

Bill asked Stan Benes to introduce Dan Brunkhorst.

Dan Brunkhorst – Introduction to Lewistown RMP

Presented an introduction to the planning process of the Lewistown Resource Management Plan (RMP). RMP is a multiple resource, broad scale plan that is used to guide lower lever, allotment-specific plans.

The current RMP is 20 + years old and the BLM had to add new provisions for sage grouse prior to the 2015 listing decision deadline. This deadline forced the BLM to simply add sage grouse provisions to the existing plan, rather than rewrite the full antiquated plan entirely. They will proceed with full plan revisions after the 2015 deadline has passed with the hope that the newly written sage grouse provisions will fit seamlessly into the new plan.

Lewistown RMP – Timeline

- Notice of intent Feb 10, 2014
- Scoping Period – Feb to Apr 2014
 - Public meetings in White Sulphur Springs, Winifred, Winnett, Great Falls, Lewistown, and Choteau.
- Alternative Development: April 2014
- Preparation of Draft RMP/EIS: April 2014– March 2015
- Draft by April of 2015 for public review.
- Final EIS June 2015 to April 2016
- Review May 2016
- Record of Decision: September 2016

Questions for Dan:

Mark – How does the RMP address roads, and travel plans?

Specific road closures not included in RMP.

Dean – What significant changes are being proposed in the new RMPs?

Dan said lots of things are changing in the new RMPs, but did not provide any further information or examples.

Arnie – How is the BLM RMP's addressing tribal needs and wants?

There is a process for getting tribal input that is followed for the RMPs.

Dean – Do you update all the MOU's with groups when you redo the RMPs?

No, not as a common practice. It is up to the groups to decide if the MOU needs to be updated based on the new RMP.

Monty – I noticed that predators are not on the threat lists to sage grouse. Why is that?

Because BLM does not manage predators, they leave that aspect to FWS.

Dan's full presentation is attached, please see it for more details.

Bridget Nielsen, CMR Staff, Jordan Field Office– *“What is a Habitat Management Plan?”*

- A step-down management plan of the CMR Comprehensive Conservation Plan
- It provides guidance for the management of refuge habitat and a long-term vision with continuity, and consistency for habitat management on refuge lands.

Bridget went over the contents of a habitat management plan and showed a map of the CMR's draft habitat units. The CMR establishing purpose was to maintain forage resources first used to sustain healthy population of 400,000 sharp-tailed grouse, and 1,500 pronghorn, whatever forage is left over is available for livestock. Bridget covered the steps for determining resources of concern and how they combine with refuge mandates to create management priorities on the refuge.

There are many different ecological sites on the refuge providing both challenges and opportunities for managers. How do you manage for species with conflicting habitat needs – e.g. Sprague's Pippet and Mountain Plover like completely different habitat with regards to amount of grass. Have to manage for a variety of grass cover to accommodate both species needs.

Bridget then introduced the current USFWS Inventory and Monitoring Program – which is the scientific flagship of the program. There are several survey types used by the CMR including;

- Presence absence – anecdotal, not statistical
- Qualitative Data collected – mainly observational
- Quantitative Data – more rigorous, can withstand statistical methods, stand up to peer review
- Special Cooperative Surveys – Cooperative with Govt or Academic partners.....i.e. U of M researchers.

Bridget cautioned that wildlife needs to be at the forefront of all monitoring activity.

See Bridget's full attached presentation for more detail.

Questions for Bridget:

Jason - Monitoring is number 6, but it's also number 1, because it involves measurement. Need consistency between monitoring and inventory.

Ron Moody –I am struggling to assimilate a lot of information quickly....how will this engage public outside of the refuge?

Bridget – CMR does not have a “roadmap”, trying to get a planning person on staff, very complicated CCP because of the diversity of the area.

Ron – So you are describing a conceptual process that does not at this point have tangible activity for people outside of the refuge.

Dyrck – we have heard what are the goals? But we have to start way back according to your presentation to determine what are the units.....then we determine the goals, so what comes first, the monitoring or the goals?

Bridget – have some of the inventory done already....so we are getting close to knowing what is out there so we can clearly define our goals.

Randy – front-line inventory and data already exists and we will think very hard about how refuge lands fit into the landscape and our ability to provide resources that are not provided outside of the refuge as that is

part of the purpose of the refuge.

Bridget – priority resources and concern will differ across areas resulting in different management plans.

Kit – how do you prioritize areas for management? What is the process?

Bridget – get together internally and see what can be accomplished first.

Jason – mix of private and state within a habitat management, how will management address this?

Randy – land jurisdiction will definitely play a role in this planning process.

Bill Berg– Adaptive comes up all the time but we know you are short-staffed....can we help the refuge? Is

this a new paradigm of how the refuge can conduct monitoring? Are they willing to have monitoring be

conducted as a group effort and allow input on how to interpret the monitoring data? Make the

monitoring public, but retain the ability of the refuge to do the management?

Matt – This is a good opportunity to share information across venues. We will not be working solely within

the FWS ivory tower anymore, but ultimately the FWS will make the decision about the management on

the refuge

Randy – NRCS staff spent a full day educating staff members about ecological sites on the refuge.

Jason Holt – sent some CMR staff to Dakotas for some monitoring training. Was this wildlife oriented?

Previous monitoring presentations at CMR CWG meetings were very livestock oriented, I want to know

more about monitoring for wildlife.

Bridget – wildlife monitoring can be much more complex than what Rick Caquelin presented at the last meeting.

Jason – expressed concern that we should be monitoring at all levels, including small invertebrates, because of the impact they can have on the landscape.

Bridget – research trying to determine the success of sage grouse initiative grazing....looking at vegetation,

bird populations, and bug components...using pit traps in grazed, ungrazed, and between different grazing

strategies.

Ron – Do the agencies at this time have an organized interagency team coordinating or communicating on planning efforts?

Rick – Very legitimate concern about how agencies manage the “edges” People serve on each other’s planning teams as cooperating agencies to help smooth out those boundaries....between fed and fed, fed and state, and even fed and private to help each other accomplish their goals of management.

Dan Brunkhorst –BLM has been working with state to make sure that their plan matches up with any state plans, otherwise becomes very difficult for land managers when buffer zones are different across boundaries.

Ron – suggested that coordinating efforts between agencies be more visible to the public.

Rick –This planning effort is going to require detailed knowledge specific to each area. Perhaps it will require the formation of 13 distinct stakeholder groups for each of the 13 priority areas of the HMP? Rick wants as much consistency and uniformity as possible between the 13 areas even though they will have very different management goals.

Jon Siddoway (NRCS) – Ecological Sites

Jon discussed the basic principles of Ecological sites, how they are classified, how the ecological site key works, and the components of an ecological site description.

A multitude of characteristics influence the potential of a site such as soil depth, texture water holding capacity, slope, aspect, position on landform, and climate.

A key is a tool to collect effective documentation on a site. Keys are dichotomous and lead people through a hierarchy based on Major Land Resource Areas (MLRAs) to 1 of 53 possible ecological sites.

The ecological site description provides specific information on soil type for the site. Then, when you look at

that soil type within a MLRA, you can find specific information for production potential, stocking rate, etc. See Jon's full, attached presentation for details.

Jason – Does timing of rainfall influence vegetation?

Jon – yes, as move East see later season rainfall that can shift plant community to warm season grasses.

Arnie – this tool helps you decide different sites in MT and helps make an assessment about different management and how the site responds. Do you go back to sites and monitor to see how quickly changes could occur? Any protocol as to how often you should monitor these sites based on their potential to recover?

Jon – have to have good goals and make your monitoring decisions based on what your goals are. Must keep records of abiotic factors or you can never draw conclusions.

Arnie – what about a site where it was assessed, changes were made and then it does not move in the planned direction?

Jon – That does happen and that is where adaptive management comes in.

Bill Milton – Beware of being too adaptive in your management and making changes on a yearly basis that could be related only to precip amount and not a direct result of management.

Bridget – if we don't start with the ecological sites, we may put unrealistic expectations on a site and be trying to manage a habitat that we cannot achieve.

Dennis – suggested that we add ecological site descriptions to the map to facilitate discussions centered around what we want to see on the landscape in relation to what it is capable of producing or supporting.

Rachel Frost and Jason Holt – goals for Monitorfest

The following goals and logistics were presented to the group:

Goals

1. Learn about the CMR's habitat management plans and their specific goals for certain habitats.
2. Learn about the soils and climate on the CMR and how those affect plant production and diversity.
3. Learn about important plant species on the CMR and the role they play in management.
4. Learn the basics of plant response to disturbance and animal grazing behavior.
5. Showcase 3 monitoring methods and discuss their pros and cons in relation to the CMR landscape.
6. Learn enough about monitoring that we can be able to provide meaningful comments from the group as the CMR develops their monitoring plan.

Logistics

- A. Dates of the upcoming meetings and the field tour(s). (*Very important so we can secure speakers and attendees*).
- B. Select speakers and programs for the upcoming meetings and tours.
- C. Locations of field tours (*Not necessary to be on the CMR, but should be on representative areas as much as possible*).
- D. Transportation for the group (*depending on location*).
- E. Field supplies if workshops are hands-on.
- F. Refreshments.
- G. Advertising campaign for the meetings and workshop series.

Questions for the group

1. How many field days are we planning? One would be easiest for logistics, but we do not want to have information overload or shortcut speakers, especially if we bring them in from out of state.
2. What is the date of the field trip(s)? Will these be planned in addition to our regularly scheduled meetings?

Decided on 1 field trip day, with several expressing that picking a site was of foremost priority. The group determined to

proceed with plant response to grazing and grazing behavior of animals as topics for presentations at our next meeting. The monitoring committee will select speakers and finalize the agenda. Some discussion on the need to key out ecological sites occurred, but it was generally agreed that we can find ecological site information, and that the goals of this exercise are to learn about the methods themselves.

Wrap up

Announcements

The monitoring committee will meet and develop the agenda for the next meeting to continue providing background for monitorfest.

Next meeting is April 17, 2014 in Circle, MT

Adjourned at 3:10 p.m.