

CMR NWR Community Working Group Meeting Minutes for June 2nd, 2011 Rimrock Plaza Winnett, MT

Attendees:

Ron Moody, Don Woerner, Dyrck Van Hying, Paul Gies, Monte Billing, Damien Austin, Nancy Schultz, John Schultz, Gary Gershmel, Skip Ahlgren, Diane Ahlgren, Bill Milton, Laurie Riley, John Chase, Carie Hess, Ralph Corbet, Janelle Holden, Mary Jones, Mark Good, Bryce Christensen, Jason Holt, Nathan Hawkaluk, Jeanne Kirkegard, Steve Wanderaas, Len Johnson.

The CMR NWR Community Working Group held our 8th meeting on June 2nd, 2011 at the Rimrock Plaza in Winnett, Montana with 25 people in attendance. Coffee and doughnuts were available prior to the start of the meeting.

Facilitator Bill Milton opened the meeting at 10:06 a.m. with introductions and asked ***Who you are, where you are from, and how has this spring impacted your life or community?*** The participants were seated in a circle and each person introduced themselves and answered the question in turn. Once everyone had answered the grounding question, Bill introduced the speakers for the day.

Mark Good, Outreach Coordinator, Great Falls Office, Montana Wilderness Association (MWA).

MWA is a statewide private nonprofit membership organization with about 5,000 members. It was founded in 1958 by Ken & Florence Baldwin, who lived in and around the Bozeman area, and a handful of others. MWA has formed some unusual alliances over the years such as with loggers, sawmill workers and owners, and ranchers. Their primary focus is on federal public lands but they recognize that they can't be so narrowly focused by not also recognizing the relationship between surrounding private lands and nearby communities.

Mark feels that when people hear about wilderness or wildlands they generally associate the term with mountainous forested landscapes, not prairie landscapes, with the mainstream view being that prairie landscapes are boring. Prairies have a long, proud, colorful and sometimes difficult history behind them. Montana and the nation have changed significantly over the past 200 years and continue to change. Mark stated that we can't return to the past, or recreate the vast wilderness that once existed, nor would we want to. With changing patterns of land use, MWA believes there is also a need to continue to preserve some of the best of what is left of this once vast prairie landscape by managing some of our public lands more for their wildland and wilderness values. MWA feels that it is our responsibility and gift to future generations so that they too can appreciate and use these lands as we do. MWA feels maintaining public lands somewhat as they are requires some type of protective designation whether it be wildlife refuges, wild and scenic rivers, national monuments, wilderness study areas, or state parks.

Mark noted that in eastern Montana most federal lands are managed by the BLM or the USFWS, with a small portion of USFW land. Each agency manages for different uses. BLM manages almost 8 million acres in Montana, most of which are in the eastern part of the state and managed for multiple use, including conservation and wildland values. But multiple use doesn't mean all uses in all places, but rather a balance of uses across the landscape. Currently there are only 250,000 acres of BLM wilderness study areas over the 40 – 50 million acre eastern half of the state. Mark showed the group a map of wilderness study areas. He noted that people have different reasons for wanting to protect some of our public lands, be it wilderness or some other protective designation. For some it is for recreation like hunting, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, camping and other activities. For others it might be about wildlife, especially non game wildlife, historic preservation, threatened and unique vegetation, scenic beauty, or a sense of solitude. And yet still for others it is simply a moral or religious imperative that we should be able and willing to limit the extent of our demands on the earth and other forms of life so that at least a tiny portion of God's creation can remain untrammelled by humanity. Mark stated if nothing else, wilderness serves as a kind of benchmark for us to know whether or not we are improving nature with all our tinkering. As we adapt to climate change these areas may become more important. He stated that as a nation we have long recognized that there is value in keeping some places much as they are.

Mark stated that protected landscapes have economic value too. He gave a few examples such as the CMR Refuge and Lewistown. He then talked about the economic trends over the last 30 years. In the 1990s, western Montana was among the top 10 states in terms of population and job growth. While eastern Montana was in the bottom 10 by the same measures and actually losing population. He further stated that the economic vitality of the western part of the state is

partly related to the attraction of undeveloped mountain landscapes. Mark noted that this has not always been that case and it is relatively new but is also happening in the desert areas in the southwestern United States.

It was gold and the pursuit of mineral wealth that brought people to Montana and when they ran out the people deserted the areas leaving behind hundreds of ghost towns. Mark stated that the point is that people's appreciation of landscapes changes and develops. It would not take a major reversal of American attitudes toward prairies to begin to stabilize and modestly repopulate the region. In a country of over 300 million people, only a tiny fraction need develop an appreciation for these landscapes to attract people and businesses as in the western part of the state.

Mark continued by asking "what is a wilderness?" Wilderness is a protective designation, the purpose of which is to keep an area much like it is for future generations. There were no legally designated wilderness areas until the passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964, which passed with bipartisan support. Further, only Congress can designate an area as wilderness, making it hard to establish but also hard to eliminate. Under the Wilderness Act, public access for a multitude of uses is provided and the wilderness designation allows the public to fish, hunt, camp, engage in wildlife viewing, ride horses, go on trips with outfitters, and many other traditional uses while safeguarding wildlife, native plants, and historic sites. Wilderness also allows for livestock grazing where it exists and grazing cannot be eliminated due to the wilderness designation. It is also practical in its application in that it allows machinery and vehicles to be used to fix fences and repair reservoirs or rescue people in an emergency. Wildfires can be fought in Wilderness areas the same as on any other public lands and noxious weeds can be treated.

Finally he showed a brochure and map of the Terry Badlands which MWA volunteers worked on with a member of the Prairie County Economic Development Council. The brochure is a guide to the Terry Badlands but also highlights the Evelyn Cameron Museum and the town of Terry.

Mark concluded by saying that he thinks there is potential here for an ongoing dialogue that moves beyond some of the rhetoric that often surrounds public land issues into a more complete understanding of the long run benefits and costs associated with preserving natural landscapes. Ranching and farming operations, oil and gas drilling, will always be a part of this landscape and should be. But MWA also believes that a variety of the protective measures will help preserve that which is unique and special about central and eastern Montana. And doing so will contribute to the vitality and diversity of local communities and landscapes. Furthermore, Mark said "they don't make any more 'Wilderness' in a world with more and more people and more development of all types. What exists here is rare."

Throughout Mark's presentation he showed shared PowerPoint slides of wilderness areas photos.

Janelle Holden, The Wilderness Society, The Wilderness Society is a national organization founded by Bob Marshall and currently has about 500,000 members nationwide and a staff of about 200. They differ from the Montana Wilderness Association in that they are headquartered in Washington, DC and work on Capitol Hill and with federal agencies for wilderness protection. In the Northern Rockies, which covers Montana and Wyoming, they have 12 staff members and she is the only staff member working on prairie issues.

Bill then opened up the Q & A with Mark and Janelle. During the Q & A the use of machinery and vehicles in Wilderness in order to fix fences, repair dams, rescue people in an emergency, etc. was questioned. Nathan Hawkaluk with the CMR station in Jordan answered with the following statement. The use of such things on the refuge, proposed or designated wilderness areas would require that a minimal tool analysis be conducted. These can be done either for blanket use of a particular tool or as a specific task or location. Another question was how many acres are actively being studied for wilderness study areas? There are 3.7 million acres of designated areas in western Montana and 150,000 acres in the CMR.

Damien Austin, Reserve Forman, American Prairie Foundation.

Damien started his presentation by stating that the mission of the APF is to create a multimillion acre wildlife reserve (APR or American Prairie Reserve) with biodiversity, with both public and private lands. It would be similar to the

National Park system with amenities and would be fully endowed. He stated that the reserve is in this area because a largely intact landscape exists with large amounts of public land compatible with APF mission to manage for biodiversity.

The APF runs 40,000 acres of deeded and 84,000 acres of leased land. He noted that they purchase only from willing sellers, pay fair market value, and pay all property taxes on the deeded acres as any other private landowner. Currently almost all of the property is leased back for cattle grazing but they would like to have bison graze this eventually. The APR will be completely open to the public. The first campground has been installed with 7 RV sites, 4 tent sites, and 2 toilet facilities. The first interpretive trail will go in this summer.

Damien stated that 28,000 of the 40,000 deeded acres are enrolled in block management and as the leases are up they will enroll more. They do not take payments for their block management. Their funding is ninety percent individual contributors (of which 20% comes from MT) and ten percent from grants. It is important to the APF to support the communities. They employ 4 people in Phillips County, bank locally, and purchase goods and services locally whenever possible.

The issue of bison was the next to be addressed. Damien stated that the herd of about 120 is considered livestock by the USDA and that the APF abides by the same regulations as cattle producers. They pay all of the fees associated with cattle/livestock. This last year they removed almost 100 bison from the reserve: 1 (escaped) animal was killed based on terms of an MOU with the Ranchers Stewardship Alliance; 1 was killed for a museum; 20 were shipped to the Bronx zoo; 20 were shipped to Colorado State University; 47 were shipped to Ft Peck Tribe. Damien noted the partners and contributors to the APF, such as the World Wildlife Fund, serve as science advisors. The U of M and MSU send students to complete studies, and the Wildlife Conservation Society is currently doing a grasslands study on the reserve. In conclusion, it was stated that the future plan is for the reserve to stay in private ownership and that the APR would take over as APF completes the job of building the reserve.

Bill then opened up the Q & A with Damien and Bryce Christensen, Manager of Field Operations.

A no-host (cash) lunch was served from 12:35 to 1:15 p.m.

After lunch, meeting facilitator Bill Milton had the group break into smaller working groups of 4 - 5 people each in order to answer 2 questions. The groups were given about 20 – 30 minutes to gather their answers.

Q-1) What is one important thing you have learned?

Q-2) What concerns or questions came about from the presentations?

Group Summaries:

1. Group 1

Q1:

There are more wilderness areas than thought; MWA and TWS are different as TWS focuses on DC-based action; Terry Badlands have interesting rock formations; Wilderness is created by congress which makes it hard to create and hard to get rid of; Grasslands are becoming important to people who don't live here; the photos from the past seem to show less grass than we have now. APF pays taxes, APF vision includes BLM & CMR, APF has been giving bison to Fort Peck Tribe, has 40,000 deeded acres, and they have an MOU with Ranchers Stewardship Alliance.

Q2:

What about bison on CMR, who will those belong to; what about proposed wilderness areas; where are the people who graze the CMR and why aren't they here; can wilderness tourism really generate economic activity comparable to agriculture in our communities; APF employees get their salary whether the ranch produces or not; won't the county lose its agricultural infrastructure once producers are bought out; can we come up with a

conservation vision that values the ranchers on the land and preserves their role in the ecosystem. Why are we so polarized - there seems to be a gap in the way we communicate; we need to acknowledge that the people in this room all really care about this place; ranchers have to run their operations like a business or they can't live on the land; how many people visit the Blackfoot Wilderness Study Area each year; we don't manage public lands for livestock production; ranchers use public lands to make their ranches sustainable.

2. Group 2

Q1:

Multiple use of land; they have a goal; includes cultural and grazing (historical values); surprised that it started in 1958; small amount of WSA still hanging since 1990; two different organizations; two different wilderness designations; no immediate plans to cross the river; and goals for buffalo; building relationships can contribute to excellent dialogue; have an MOU; transport bison to the Fort Peck Tribe; 1200 hunting days on APF.

Q2:

Loss of revenue for both county and rancher; added revenue for tourism but loss for the rancher; take land out of production requires putting land back in somewhere else and that could ruin the environment somewhere else (i.e. rainforests); study WSA now counted in 1990; when does it run out; why would a designation such as a WA/ EIS as opposed to landowner making use of land (more precise with the words we use); effects on counties and ranches incomes; changes after transferring the name over to a prairie reserve and why change the name; could CMR work with APF; concerned with answer time will tell, a resource program financed.

3. Group 3

Q1:

Only small percentage of land in wilderness; mechanized equipment allowed in wilderness – site specific and based on emergency; what areas look like from the slides; in general learned about the MWA; minimal tool analysis; where wilderness areas are located; TWS has 200 employees & Janelle is the only one on prairies; APF sold or gave away bison and that they don't keep them all; snow bridges and the bison escaped last winter; facts and figures on APF deeded and leased lands; learned the end game is a private entity; MOU with RSA.

Q2:

WSAs are open-ended in time and think that after a designation the clock should start ticking for a time period to final designation or not; fire issue to balance and educate and save property; small communities – stabilize economically; 1000s of bison crossing onto private land and destruction of land, crops, stored hay, fences; ranches purchased and moving people off the land has a big impact on community and changes the landscape; loss of heritage, loss of community; loss of food and by products. Paranoid concern over bison and think that there are solutions, taking worst case scenario as what would happen ultimately is synonymous with paranoia over Muslims as terrorists.

4. Group 4:

Q1:

Did not know that there was a distinction between WSA and designated wilderness; amount of proposed wilderness area in Eastern Montana; the Wilderness Society and MWA are friendly with ranchers; APF is more than growing bison; difference between the MWA and the Wilderness Society

Q2:

APF is a bison outfit; containment of bison to the property; amount of land in wilderness areas; turning buffalo from livestock to wildlife very unnerving; MWA has no clear set of rules; more designations or get rid of the current proposed areas; progressive loss to access of Wilderness Areas; introducing projects (i.e. the Wolf) and then not taking care of it; getting a toehold then continuing to grab land.

5. Group 5:

Q1:

Equipment used; appreciation of the prairie; more about species on the APF.

Q2:

Economic impact; access to wilderness for the common person; not enough wildlife; did APF waive the fee for block management.

The bison poll was brought up and Steve Wanderaas with McCone County CD talked about conducting a local poll using the same questions as the NWF but within the 6 counties. There was a lot of discussion about making sure this poll was not one-sided. A poll must be conducted properly in order to be credible. Laurie mentioned that there was information in the NWF poll that was not shared at the last meeting and felt that the original poll should be looked at a bit further. She stated that it is available and can be obtained either through the NWF website or by contacting her at the MRCDC office.

The group addressed the issue of policy related to handling statements or questions from non present people at the meeting. At the last meeting emailed questions became the basis for 2 of the 3 breakout group questions. As a general rule going forward, Bill Milton will formulate the break out group questions based on the content of the first half of the meeting. Emailed questions or questions relayed to a person present at the meeting may be addressed, but will not be a meeting focus. It was also requested that Bill Milton's and Laurie Riley's contact information be added to the minutes.

The Planning Committee was brought up and there are 2 positions that need to be filled, one for Agriculture and one for Recreation. It was thought that nominations could be sent to Laurie with Bill copied (cc'd) by email.

It was noted that people need to be players in this group. Names of people/groups to contact/invite were mentioned: FWP, Tribes, The Nature Conservancy, permittees. Laurie noted that all CMR permittees were added to notification list for this meeting, FWP has been invited and has had representation, Ft Peck Tribe has received notification of all meetings.

Presenters were discussed for the next couple of meetings:

August

Mary Sexton- State lands and land trades within the CMR
BLM - both Deb and Stan Benes

October

MT Water Rights Compact
CDs / MRCDC

Janelle mentioned that this was to be her last meeting but that John Todd would be her replacement.

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

What worked well?

- Format
- Continued dialogue
- Making progress
- Good flow
- Better mixture of break out groups

What could be improved?

- Permittees to meetings
- Encourage people to come that could be impacted
- Better promoting

The next meeting date was announced as August 11th in Lewistown.

The group adjourned at approximately 3:00 pm.