

# **CMR NWR Community Working Group Meeting Minutes for June 20th, 2012 Winnett School Multipurpose Room, Winnett, MT**

**Attendees:** Ron Garwood, Jason Holt, Laurie Riley, Dyrck Van Hyning, Dave Pippin, Dean Rogge, Heidi Finke, Tom Pick, Rick Potts, John Chase, Melissa Hornbein, Kit Fischer, Diane Ahlgren, Ron Moody, Brandon Sandau, Laura Kiehl, Nathan Hawkaluk, Helina Alvarez, Virginia Murnion, Johnnie Schultz, Chris King, Skip Ahlgren, Nikki Rife, Damien Austin, Russell Laford, Don Woerner, Bill Berg, Dustin (Summer Intern with the RWRCC), Carie Hess, and Bill Milton.

The CMR NWR Community Working Group held our 14<sup>th</sup> meeting on June 20th, 2012 at the Winnett School Multipurpose Room in Winnett, Montana with 30 people in attendance. Coffee and pastries were available prior to the start of the meeting.

Facilitator Bill Milton opened the meeting at 10:10 a.m. by asking the grounding question “how is the moisture situation and the growing conditions at home?” The participants were seated in a circle and each person introduced themselves and answered the questions in turn.

Bill introduced **Rick Potts, CMR Refuge Manager**.

Rick started by saying that the Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (CCP) was started almost 5 years ago to the day. He then stated that grassland management is an overall concern no matter whether for wildlife, agricultural reasons, or scenic reasons and we are in a complex mosaic of landscapes. He is hoping that with the CCP there can be an 80/20 compromise, whereby 20 percent will probably not be agreed upon due to purposes and missions of the various groups but that 80 percent can be agreed upon. He gave a brief timeline of how the CCP has been progressing.

## **June 2007- Pre planning**

**Late Fall 2007 – public involvement and scoping**

**Summer 2008- alternatives developed**

**Fall 2010 – Draft CCP and EIS released**

**Spring 2012 – Final CCP and EIS released**

**Summer 2012 – Record of Decision**

**Fall 2012 – Final CCP**

Rick explained that the USFWS they had received a total of 20,600 comments from all sources; they had 53 agency and organization letters, 190 individual letters, and 5 petitions. Those equaled about 19,627 of the comments and are further broken down as follows. National Wildlife Federation equaled 11,278, Wilderness Society equaled 7,503, Defenders of Wildlife equaled 694, Nonaffiliated Local Communities equaled 120, and Concerned Citizens for Garfield County equaled 32. He noted that the responses to comments are detailed in Volume 2. He showed a slide with the top 10 common concerns from individuals and stated that the form letters were not included as it would skew the list. These concerns were: support of expanded wilderness, opposition to removal of proposed wilderness, support for managing the refuge for wildlife, editorial suggestions or errors in the document, support of general wildlife restoration and protection, support for Alternative B, support of expansion of prescriptive grazing and reduction of livestock, advocacy for road closures and reduced motorized vehicle access, support of the No Action Alternative (A), general habitat and wildlife management. Rick briefly reviewed each of the Alternatives.

Rick then outlined the changes made to the final CCP. Under the wilderness topic they revised Appendix E and clarified that any additions would become wilderness study areas (WSAs). Existing proposed wilderness remains unchanged. They have modified acreage for the WSAs: acreage for Alternative B would be 25,879 in 9 units; acreage in Alternative D (the identified Preferred Alternative) would be 19,942 in 8 units. They determined that there is not sufficient justification for recommending the removal of any existing proposed wilderness previously considered in Alternatives C and D and noted that reasoning in the document. He shared a map for clarification.

Under the topic of Roads they changed Road 315 in Petroleum County in alternative D from closed to seasonally closed from the junction of road 838 to the end. They designated about 13 miles of roads on the northeast side (roads 331, 332,

333, 440 in Valley County) as game retrieval roads in alternative D (previously identified for closure in alternative B). These would be seasonal closures during hunting season when most of the use occurs but roads would be open for several hours a day for game retrieval only.

Under the topic of wildlife objectives they adjusted and clarified that big game objectives would meet or exceed objectives approved in existing State Plans. In coordination with MT Fish, Wildlife, & Parks, there would be refuge-specific abundance and population composition objectives established through the habitat management planning process and would be tailored to regional habitat conditions, productivity, and considerations for functioning ecosystem processes, biological integrity, and hunting opportunities and experiences.

The CMR also updated information of the Threatened and Endangered species as well as species of concern. Rick showed slides on preliminary data from a mountain lion study reflecting a possibility that the refuge might be feeding the mountain lion populations in the satellite mountain ranges within a 100 mile radius.

Rick noted that in the habitat objectives they clarified and expanded on the prescriptive grazing definition and information as well as made several organizational changes to the habitat objectives including changing livestock grazing from an objective to a strategy. They also clarified that the timeframe for implementation of prescribed grazing under Alternative A (current management) would be similar to Alternative C.

They also expanded the discussion on sentinel plant monitoring, and identified miles of streams to be prioritized for restoration. They expanded monitoring and management discussion to identify the focal bird species for each broad habitat category (upland, river bottom, riparian areas, and wetlands) and connected the sentinel plant monitoring to focal bird species, particularly in Alternative D.

The final topics for which Rick noted changes were: minerals, land acquisition, legal mandates, and water and climate change. The CCP clarified that mineral withdrawals are for locatable minerals, clarified that the Service would continue to acquire lands in accordance with the CMR Enhancement Act. They expanded the discussion on history, Service policies and other legal mandates, water quality, air monitoring and climate change.

Lunch was served.

Bill Milton had the group break into smaller working groups of 4 - 5 people each and had them answer 2 questions. The groups were given about 20 – 30 minutes to gather their answers.

Q-1) How can the CMR NWR Community Working Group engage in the implementation of the CCP?

Q-2) Thinking 1 to 2 years down the road, describe one clear achievable, measurable outcome resulting from the CMR groups existence?

### **Group Summaries:**

#### **1. Group 1:**

**Q1:** Advice for refuge objectives in step down plans, getting information out to a larger public, CMR working group could function as a sounding board for ideas, coordinate field trips that would complement the step down plans, task the group with coming up with proposals for the step down plans, use the CMR group mailing list to distribute factual current planning information and activities, and have the group develop an issue list or outlines for the step down plans.

**Q2:** Prioritize noxious weeds for invasive species step down plan, CMR group working with agencies, landowners, and counties regarding noxious weeds

#### **2. Group 2:**

**Q1:** The group could provide ongoing monitoring of implementation, formally engage in step down plans and NEPA process, serve as an un-official RAC, identify priority issues.

**Q2:** Develop relationship with Ag community that allows producers to be economically viable and CMR to meet their mission, develop a mutually beneficial relationship between stakeholders to manage 1,000 acres or 6 miles of river for weeds, identify missing stakeholders and get them to the meetings.

### **3. Group 3:**

**Q1:** Focus on step down plans and address the CCP step down plans one at a time, coming up with recommendations to the CMR, keep local communities informed, keep commenting on how to implement the CCP, reach out beyond local communities to seek out potential for wildlife and habitat, keep a variety of different groups involved. Pick one topic to focus on for consensus and pick one habitat unit to work on.

**Q2:** To have 5 ranches more secure in their relationship with the CMR, a plan for wild bison to be at the CMR, successfully tackle one issue on a specific issue, 1 statement of consensus on 1 issue.

### **4. Group 4:**

**Q1:** Unified therefore strengthened voice, comment of the step down plans, provide a venue for diverse public comment, group to bring ideas to the CMR to engage in CCP, propose a cooperative project that can be mutually beneficial to working group and fit in with the framework of the CCP, manage fuel loads, assist CMR in meetings specific habitat objective while preserving economical sustainability.

**Q2:** Keep ranchers on and around the CMR to assist in the economic preservation of local communities through predictable AUMs, no net loss of ranches in the vicinity of CMR.

### **5. Group 5:**

**Q1:** Getting to know our neighbors the ideas they have, the groups they represent, and strive to agree on 2 or so issues associated with the CMR step down process and monitor whether or not our suggestions are being implemented.

**Q2:** Help find common ground be keeping firewall porous, function as the connection between the CMR and county entities, facilitate tours to monitor CMR's progress on the step down plans, be involved in the development of the step down plans, influence the decision making process by our own participation in the process.

Bill asked the group if a good next step would be identifying a list of priorities and issues so that the group could set some goals and objectives. Jason Holt commented that there should be 3 lists one listing what is easy to accomplish, one listing what is important, and one listing what needs to be addressed now as with the step down plans. A discussion followed on how to prioritize and how the issues reflect the CCP. The group should establish a plan of action on how to deal with and work on the issues. We can start with (again) sharing the list of issues identified at the meeting in Circle with the full group. And then fine tune the list at the next meeting in Lewistown.

#### Next Meeting

Our identified speaker for the meeting in Lewistown is Jason Holt with an interactive exercise and philosophical presentation on establishing land management objectives. This can help guide the group in developing priority issues and goals for a work plan.

#### Announcements

Melissa Hornbein updated the group on the status of the CMR's proposed water rights compact. Negotiations are halted due to public opposition to the current proposal. The Compact Commission is working on a counter proposal to the USFWS for the CMR.

Dean Rogge gave a brief overview of a proposed pilot project. The Garfield County CD is working on a proposal to the CMR to manage an allotment in Garfield County using cattle grazing as a tool to help reach the CMR's management

goals for wildlife. Dean and a consultant from Land EKG will try to present the proposal at the next meeting in Lewistown. This will be a nice tie-in with the objectives of the meeting and the other speaker.

Laurie Riley told the group about a grassland study & program being undertaken by Oklahoma State University – *Cultural and Biological Adaptations in Grasslands: Towards an Interactive Research and Education Program*. This was brought to her attention via email from Dennis Jorgensen. The goal of the study/program is to develop an interdisciplinary team to understand the unique relationship between humans and grassland ecosystems. Laurie would like to help the team establish contacts with local landowners/producers, as the study involves grasslands-human interactions. They have chosen 4 study areas, of which the CMR/APR complex is one. Rick Potts invited Laurie to a meeting in July with members of the Team from OSU.

Bill asked what worked well what could be done better.

<b>Well</b>	<b>Work on</b>
Format of the meeting	Discussions in the smaller groups
Agreement of the group to prioritize goals	Openness in how the process in progressing
Listening to each other	

The next meeting date was announced as August 8<sup>th</sup> in Lewistown.

The group adjourned at approximately 3:10 pm.