

CMR NWR Community Working Group Meeting Minutes for November 5, 2015 Roy Firehall, Roy, MT

Bill Milton called the meeting to order at 10:03 am with 43 people in attendance. Each participant was asked to state their name, who they represent, and to share an opportunity you realize for yourself in the group and to describe what keeps you coming back.

Answers varied with most people expressing new partners and new direction tied with building trust in original attendees.

SG Subcommittee – report from meeting the previous day. Three main tasks were identified by the group: 1) Outreach to producers about programs, 2) Input from producers, 3) continue with the conservation menu, put into format that is easy to use.

Montana Sage Grouse Program Update – Carolyn Sime, Coordinator for the Montana Sage Grouse Program provided an update on the progress of the program and the Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team (MSGOT).

MSGOT – group of 9 people that determine how the \$10M set aside for habitat restoration will be spent. The Executive Order – charged that state government begin to incorporate sage grouse into their regular management programs. There is a new website for MSGOT, it is hoped that the state program will establish connections with landowners/producers when working on management strategies across large landscapes.

Discussion followed on the habitat objectives for sage grouse and how monitoring would fit into the full program.

Lunch Break

Mark Good – The Montana Wilderness Society has put together a geotourism map of Montana. They worked with a private landowner to create a map of the Terry Badlands, and they have created the Buttes, Breaks, and Badlands of Southeast MT map in efforts to highlight the features of BLM lands that are “off the beaten path”.

Marissa Sather, Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program within the US FWS – Marissa presented results from her Dissertation on the effects of landscape scale management on grassland birds.

- Since the 1960s, grassland birds have been dramatically decreasing with several species under consideration for possible T&E listing.
- Think BIG – where to restore based on surrounding vegetation, making a high quality habitat better results in the most benefit to the bird. Better to work on intact that already fragmented landscapes.

Management to protect the landscape

- Prioritize protection of intact landscapes (an intact working ranch is protected)
- Focus on private land - private lands comprise 80% of the habitat, so think on scale, not on the political boundaries
- Focus on habitat outcomes, not grazing strategy per se
 - Does not matter how you graze it if you don't have it (grassland). Wasting time trying to rest non-productive soils for bird habitat. Precipitation and soil are the primary drivers in grass production, grazing is just additive to these constraints. Grazing can provide the variety in cover that is needed by the different species of birds.
- Manage outside the lines

Everyone plays a role on the landscape and we all need to make sure we are doing our individual role for the betterment of the landscape.

Ranching landscapes are one of the best things in conservation because they keep grasslands from being converted into cropland.

Break Out Group Session

Attendees were divided into 6 groups and asked to answer the following questions: Small Group Breakouts to address the following questions: There are currently many attempts to measure the biological effects of different management and conservation activities

Question 1: *How can we also measure the effects of these management and conservation efforts on the social and economic fabric of the 6-county region?*

Question 2: *What role does succession planning for ranches play in the biological, social, and economic success of the region?*

Question 3: *What does succession planning look like in local government and agencies?*

The groups were given approximately 20 minutes to discuss these topics, then the large group reconvened and each group shared their results. Below is a compilation of answers derived from the groups.

Question 1: *How can we also measure the effects of these management and conservation efforts on the social and economic fabric of the 6-county region?*

Number of active grazing permits and associated AUMs
Profit, productivity/output of local producers
Vitality of Downtown (prosperous local economy)
Media coverage and hot topics
Economic effect of wildlife conservation activities
Land prices
School attendance
Commodity prices of local products

Local wildlife populations

Question 2: *What role does succession planning for ranches play in the biological, social, and economic success of the region?*

Tax credits for ranching/agriculture

Options for future generations need to be preserved rather than dictated

Conservation easements an incredible tool to pass along land to stay in production

Succession is an undervalued and overlooked piece of the conservation puzzle

Question 3: *What does succession planning look like in local government and agencies?*

Hiring more positions in the place of elected positions

Organize information and record keeping

Ethics

History

Develop local lines of communication to help ease the transition of new employees

Find ways to maintain trust through the changing of employees

Local involvement in hiring process and using local CD board to help with the transitions of new employees

Local government reprioritizing tasks and responsibilities to focus on local succession planning

Use existing training resources such as Extension, and programs to facilitate succession

Next meeting scheduled for December 17th in Zortman.

The following meeting schedule for 2016 was approved pending possible date adjustment prior to each meeting:

In an effort to better communicate dates and locations of meetings to facilitate attendance, MRCDC prepared a draft schedule for 2016. The following dates and locations are proposed and would require approval of the CMR CWG membership. Meetings are proposed for Thursdays and the locations were rotated according to weather considerations and regional travel of attendees.

| Meeting Month | Meeting Day | Meeting Location |
|---------------|------------------|------------------|
| February | 25 th | Lewistown/Roy |
| April | 14 th | Winnett |
| June | 23 rd | Circle |
| August | 25 th | Fort Peck |
| October | 6 th | Jordan |
| December | 8 th | Malta |

Possible tours of the CMR and surrounding areas were discussed. Tours would likely be conducted in June, August, or October and the meeting location rotation would be adjusted thereby.