

# CMR Community Working Group Meeting Summary

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**Where:** VFW Hall Jordan

**Opening:** 10: 10 AM

**Attendance:** 39

**Self-Introduction & Grounding Question:** What constitutes a natural disaster to you?

## CMR CWG Committee Reports:

- **Montana Saltcedar Team:** Willie Friedman, Big Sky Watershed Corps Member with Petroleum CD and MRCD has been organizing volunteers and an MCC Wildlands Crew to float from Wolf Point to Culbertson and treat saltcedar plants below the high-water mark of the Missouri River. The treatment will take place the week of August 28<sup>th</sup> – September 1. Paul Santavy mentioned that FWS has been attempting to control a saltcedar infestation on the west side of the reservoir, but, it is a slow and difficult process due to the rough terrain.
- **CMR Pilot Project:** The contractor is out this week conducting the third year of consistent monitoring. Should be able to start working towards recommendations.
- **MSGOT:** A total of 1120 projects have been reviewed to date. It was asked if the sage grouse program can help with fire recovery. The answer is no, fire recover is not within the confines of the program unless it involved direct planting of sagebrush and creation of sage grouse habitat. The next meeting is August 31, 2017 in Helena at the Capitol. Diane mentioned that the original work group has been reconvened to provide input on the habitat quantification tool. She also mentioned that they have been assessing the disturbance cap which is currently five percent. MSGOT is also looking at rangeland improvements and exploring opportunities for exemptions on some projects. There were a 7 or 8 leks damaged in the fire, but only one in core habitat. While there was likely some loss of birds, overall the population is expected to remain steady.
- **Winnett Working Group:** Laura gave a brief history of the group and the projects. She mentioned the beef to school program, farm to school program, rangeland monitoring on a landscape level, a community recycling program, community center, and the land purchasing subcommittee. The group hired a coordinator to do a feasibility study which started in June and should conclude in February. Laura talked about the conservation collaborative workshop on August 29<sup>th</sup> in Winnett.

**Rural Community & Economic Research in Six County region:** Julia Haggerty, MSU Professor – Julia provided a quick update on the progress of the project and its components. The project has 3 parts: a regional survey; in-depth work supporting the Winnett land committee; and a field trip for MSU students to tour the 6-county region to learn about local livelihoods, culture and environments. Conversations of how to work with the CMR CWG to accomplish this project are on-going.

**Conservation Menu:** Soil and Water Conservation Districts have taken the menu and made it an online application.

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- **CMR Water Compact:** Paul Santavy provided an update on the CMR Water Compact, which is still in negotiation at the Federal level. During the last public comment period, there was 9-12 objections filed. All but 2 of those objections were dealt with and satisfied by the time the compact was transferred to the water court, where the objections have to be solved or the process has to be terminated and start all over for negotiating the compact. The judge reviewed the objections and threw out all but a few. Negotiations are ongoing to solve these few final objections before the final court which will take place in September or October.. The objections were the priority date and the instream flows. There has since been clarification that the priority date is 2015 and not 1936 as originally sent out by DNRC, and the instream flows are .5 and 1 cfs based on stream size.

Lunch was served, after lunch five additional people joined the group for the panel discussion.

### **Panel Discussion: Recovery from fire and drought in the 6 county region; assessing short and long term needs and how to meet those needs.**

- The ultimate goal/ purpose of the panel is to provide an insight into the immediate and long term needs of the region, especially given the fires and drought, and how to best meet those needs.
- 1. What in your opinion is the biggest immediate (short-term) need for post-fire, post drought recovery?**
  - 2. What will be some long-term (next year and beyond) needs for areas affected by the drought and fires?**
  - 3. Are there opportunities for local residents to effect positive change within the wake of the drought and fires?**
  - 4. Is there a role for the CMR CWG in fire/drought recovery coordination? If so, what is that role?**

### **Panelists:**

Paul Santavy – Project leader, CMR National Wildlife Refuge, US Fish and Wildlife Service

Bob Gibson, Information and Education Manager, Region 5, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks

Dean Rogge, Landowner near Sand Springs, MT; CD Supervisor

Jerry Collins, County Commissioner for Garfield County

Karl Christians, CD Bureau Specialist, Montana DNRC

Graham Neale, Environmental Science Specialist, State Sage Grouse Program, Montana DNRC

Reyer Reyns, Rangeland Manager, BLM Miles City Office

Sue Fitzgerald, District Conservationist, Jordan Field Office

- 1. What in your opinion is the biggest immediate (short-term) need for post-fire, post drought recovery?**

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- For FEMA: need to gather a complete picture of the cost of the fire to the State for in-kind service on the match
- Opportunities for livestock producers to hold their base herd and genetics together
- Forage availability for wildlife, may increase harvest rate for elk
- FWP can assist with game damage hunts / hay stack fencing
- Communication – those affected by the drought and fire to express their needs to the agencies and partners providing assistance
- Patience as we work through the processes
- Education – weeds, future planning
- Distribution of information so that everyone knows what assistance is available
- Pass along ideas for projects to MSGOT and others
- Rehab of dozer lines and severe fire intensity areas as needed
- Providing time for people to respond / re-plan
- Flexibility by agencies / others

## **2. What will be some long-term (next year and beyond) needs for areas affected by the drought and fires?**

- Need to change policies so that there are specific local triggers to declare disasters/emergencies (trigger changes in fire fighting strategy, i.e. BLM Wilderness Study Areas)
- Transitioning from a response/reactionary mode to a planning mode
- Keep sending a consistent message to folks watching the recovery efforts
- Promote the positive and learn from our experiences
- Reclamation of habitat, and sharing of what worked and what did not
- Get producers to articulate what they need (short-term?) continuous....
- Sit down with affected producers and help them develop a plan for the next few years that works for the producers and the land
- Re-think coordinated weed response
- Patience, understanding of how things will change on the landscape, how slow recovery can be for wildlife, etc.
- Weeds – education, monitoring, guidelines for feeding donated hay
- Re-evaluate your grazing management plan and fence placement

## **3. Are there opportunities for local residents to effect positive change within the wake of the drought and fire?**

- New water developments allowing for greater grazing flexibility
  1. Not so reliant on reservoirs for stock water

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- Keep talking to determine what flexibility lies within each agency, neighboring landowner, available leases for forage
- Continue to build relationships
- New fences with more durable construction
- Capture what this community learned and pass along to those affected by the next big fire, either here or in other areas.

#### **4. Is there a role for the CMR CWG in fire-drought recovery coordination? If so, what is that role?**

- Strength in the relationships that are built through this group, this allows for swift action in emergencies because the foundation of trust already exists
- Share the story...communicate what works, what programs are beneficial to State Conservationist, etc.
- Let people know what works and what didn't work in recovery efforts
- Host facilitated discussions on specific topics for solutions and new ideas
- Landscape coordination of the recovery efforts
- Use existing partnerships to work on landscape scale recovery
- Advertise the good that came from this to the landscape and how that things that benefit ranchers can also benefit wildlife

#### **Bill then asked the full group to share parting thoughts:**

- Look back at the fires of '03 and '06 and what really happened with the wildlife (their distribution and population levels) and the weeds. What infestations actually happened? Are we still dealing with weed infestations?
- Might not be as big a disaster as some are predicting
- Take heart from the community and the response/generosity of folks to emergencies
- Incredible opportunity to think about this land as a single landscape, plan for it to provide the landscape scale benefits (wildlife, etc)
- Ranchers have been managing their land so well that elk numbers are actually affecting their ability to run their ranch. Please take this concept back to the FWP commission and urge them to get past the politics that go with setting harvest numbers, hunt units, etc.
- Will projects in core areas leading to fire recovery be subject to the same restrictions and approval?
  - MSGOT will address this at the next meeting
- Fencing assistance for stackyards will not be available for those landowners that have not allowed access to the public in the past.

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- There are different ECP deadlines for each county depending on when the disaster/drought declaration was made
- We have a good thing going here with all the agencies that are involved and sitting at the same table
- Drought being so widespread could be very financially draining to producers, very much hope that folks will survive, without having to move. How can private, state and federal folks work together to preserve their communities?
- Petroleum County benefited from Garfield Counties knowledge and previous experience with fires. Deadman's Basin released water down the river that was used in fire fighting efforts.
- Montana Conservation Corps crews out this fall for fencing, and next spring for weeds.
- Paul did an amazing job of adapting to the immediate needs to use common sense to solve problems.
- Biggest threat to sagegrouse habitat is fire.
- Collaboration is good; appreciate the opportunity to learn from the way that Garfield County handled this fire
- Next looming disaster is weeds
- Great to be reminded of how useful and important this group is/has been in these efforts
- This group is great for learning from each other
- Everybody in MT wears a lot of hats...makes it easy to walk in each other's shoes, work together, etc.
- In 40 years of doing crop insurance, this is the most claims for hay ever
- This year is our opportunity to prove that we can manage things at the local level and do it intelligently....it is awesome and appreciated that Paul was able to make the decision to allow grazing at his office and have the support from those above him.
- Thankful that no human lives were lost during the disaster out East.

**Next Meeting:** November 8<sup>th</sup> in Lewistown **\*\*This date has been changed due to a conflicting event\*\***

### **Closing Remarks:**

- Always opportunities from disasters, improving infrastructure, etc.
- The generosity has been amazing
- Perspective and hope in humanity

**Adjournment: 3:00 PM**