

CMR NWR Community Working Group Meeting Minutes for April 14, 2016 Winnett School, Winnett, MT

The CMR Community Working Group met on April 14th at the Winnett Public School Gymnasium. Bill Milton facilitator provided a welcome and asked attendees to introduce themselves, state who they represent, and share what they like most about spring. There were approximately 65 people in attendance.

The meeting began with project and committee updates: Rachel provided a brief update on the Montana Saltcedar Team and how the Garfield County project was a feature for collaborative efforts at the Governor's Invasive Species Council Summit.

Rachel also provided an update on the CMR Sage Grouse Committee and the Conservation Menu they are developing. Bill provided further information on the motivation for the menu and he discussed that it was voluntary and designed to provide ranchers with the tools needed make more informed decisions. The menu has programs from every available entity from Feds to NGO's and is meant to be user friendly. Feedback was solicited from the full group.

Rangeland Monitoring Roundup- Rachel gave history and update on the Montana Rangelands Partnership and the 2 rangeland monitoring technicians. Rachel talked about the demonstrated need for monitoring and grazing plans. She talked about the purpose of the technicians and introduced Cheryl and Emily and where they are stationed.

Bill introduced the working group's goals. Steve, Dean and Diane each read aloud one of the 3-part goals developed by the CMR working group.

Rachel followed the 3-part goals with a presentation on a summary of multiple demographic, economic, and wildlife related measures for the 6-county region that was created by Travis Wilson, Big Sky Watershed Corps Member for Petroleum County Conservation District. The presentation provided maps and graphs that depicted characteristics such as number of AUM's per county, population and age structure, prominent industries and economic drivers for the counties, and maps depicting key species ranges. Rachel mentioned that these demographics were an effort to capture the main components of the 3-part goals; the land and wildlife, the human component, and the economy of the region. Rachel shared these results via powerpoint and discussion followed asking that the information be shared via the internet with the full group.

Bill introduced the break-out sessions and described the goal for each small group. Small Group Breakouts to prioritize the projects proposed at the February meeting:

1. *Take the following list of projects and evaluate them for 2016 based on their:*
 - a. *Completeness – are additional projects needed?*
 - b. *Feasibility – is this something the group can accomplish?*
 - c. *Priority – rank the projects in order of priority for group effort in 2016*

CMR CWG Potential Projects – Lewistown, February 16th, 2016

The first 5 projects were proposed by at least 2 of the breakout groups at the meeting.

1. Weed management through the creation of 6-county task force that identifies concerns and matches to available resources. (2 groups)
2. Tourism and promotion of the use of the CMR and surrounding landscape. (2 groups)
3. Increase opportunities to bring young people back to local communities and get more young ranchers on the landscape (2 groups)
4. Incentive-based programs for wildlife such as BFF, be a vehicle to educate folks about these opportunities, and explore ways to put it into practice on the landscape. (2 groups)
5. Bison on the CMR or surrounding area: have a facilitator lead conversation about bison and under what circumstances bison would be accepted in eastern MT. (2 groups)

The next 5 projects were proposed by a single breakout group at the meeting.

6. Have the CMR CWG take part in the development of an HMP for an area on the CMR. Be involved in every step of the process and learning about management through the lens of the regulations and laws the refuge must operate under.
7. Conduct a study on the economics of the region by following a day in the life of a dollar in the 6-county.
8. Develop a contact list of all the agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders operating in the 6-county region.
9. Hold a constructive dialogue on the future of public and private lands managed as a balanced landscape with multiple uses such as oil and gas production, grazing, etc.
10. Promote monitoring of sage grouse habitat and determine a metric that indicates impacts of management activities.

Mark Good with Montana Wilderness Association provided a brief overview of what his group would like to see accomplished through a focus on recreation and tourism in the region.

John Hughes with the USFWS provided a brief summary of the black footed ferret recovery and re-introduction program and how it uses incentive-based conservation to encourage private landowner involvement. He mentioned that similar programs were being actively explored in Montana.

Bill introduces the bison project and discussed creating a working group on bison that includes discussion from all perspectives.

The small groups met and then the meeting broke for lunch.

Following lunch, Noreen Walsh, Regional Director for the US Fish and Wildlife Service arrived to provide an update on the activities of the US Fish and Wildlife Service in the Mountain-Prairie Region which encompasses 8 states. Bill and Paul Santavee made introductions and passed the mic to her. Students from the Winnett HS also attended the session to hear Noreen speak. Noreen provided a brief intro about herself and her appreciation for Montana and her history with the Service. She has been with service for 25 years, and in the Denver office for the past 8 years. She is part of Intermountain West

Joint Venture and attended those meetings earlier this week. She discussed the importance of local communities and how the CMR functions on the landscape and how she envisions it functioning as part of the local communities. Conservation solutions have to be durable, and people have to be a part of the equation. She thinks the CMR Group is a great example of how people can work towards solutions and the ecological health of the landscape. She values that the Service is able to be a part of the group.

She described what she has heard from members of the group; the importance of working on invasive species and the success of the salt cedar task force. She also heard about not being single species focused. She talked about all the focus on the sage grouse and expressed a need to focus more on the sage brush ecosystem rather than individual species of birds.

She mentioned that she is aware of the differences between “community input” versus “community support”.

She knows that many in the group want to talk about Bison. She pointed out that state has the lead on the decision on bison and the Service will follow the state’s lead. If FWP decides to pursue bison on the landscape, it is her desire to work with CMR and work with local communities to meet the needs of all, not just one entity, or just the Service.

Diane asked how the CMR CWG could provide input to the Service on this issue. Noreen stated that she doesn’t want the refuge to be an island, she wants it to be a valued part of the community. A bison working group would be a good start to the process and provide a framework for active involvement.

Bill asked about the future of grazing on the refuge. Noreen and Paul were both open to scientific information related to grazing that can help them to meet their habitat objectives. It was mentioned that CMR has purchased several properties and the question of what goals the Service has for those properties was posed. Paul said that the land will be managed as CMR and to meet their goals, not as production agriculture.

Several folks expressed a concern over the loss of revenue from federal land holdings because they fall under the reduced tax rates of the Federal Revenue Sharing Act. It was pointed out that the rise in emergency service needs, and the infrastructure requirements for recreation put more economic pressure on Counties that was returned through recreation. This topic was of interest and most determined that is warranted further discussion.

Next each small group provided a report on their project rankings:

Group 6

1. Weeds
2. Bison
3. Young families
4. Tourism

Group 5

1. Create & compile tools for community sustainability
2. Bison- foster process involvement in decisions making process
3. Weeds-
4. Format of CMR keeping list of agencies updates and available

Group 4

1. Young people, keep sustain ranching in the community
2. Weeds
3. Bison
4. Wildlife incentives

Group 3

1. Bison-? Addressed who owns them, who is responsible what's at stake vs. what's to gain
2. Tourism
3. Young ranchers NGO that are purchasing
4. Wildlife incentives projects

Group 2

1. Weed management
2. Tourism/local economic analysis of benefits to tourism
3. Bison

Group 1

1. Bison
2. Weeds-salt cedar team
3. Combo of these Tourism, Young people back to communities, Economics of region

Closing- What worked well, what did not?

Well: everyone from each agencies/NGO/producer is represented in the groups. A few first timers that came seemed to be glad they came. Mention of including some history for newcomers, many comments of the high school kids coming in and listening and even asking a few questions. Lots of praise for Noreen's attendance. Noreen listened and said she wished she would have been from the beginning.