

## CMR NWR Community Working Group Meeting Minutes for June 23, 2016 McCone County Fairgrounds, Circle, MT

Opening - 10:10 am

Attendance: 32

Self-Introduction & Grounding Question: Who you are and where you are from – How is the moisture in your area?

CMR Sage Grouse Sub-Committee:

Conservation Menu - Was planned to roll out June 23<sup>rd</sup>, but with all of the suggested edits from May's meeting, that did not happen. Everyone will have a hard copy in their hands by August at the latest.

Economic Analysis Research Project – Kit Fischer was scheduled to present on a proposed economic analysis research project for the CMR area, however, he was unable to attend, so this will be brought up at a later meeting.

MSU – WWF – Community Resiliency and Landscape Geography – Most of the remaining intact grasslands in the North American prairie are managed by ranchers. WWF and MSU have been cooperating on a study to explore ways to keep ranchers on the land as this has been determined to be one of the best ways to conserve grassland and prevent both farmland conversion and development. Researchers are focusing on ranches that are entering a transitional phase due to death or retirement of the primary managers and exploring ways to bring new/young ranchers into production. Transition of ownership or management is a key time to maintain conservation values within a ranch.

Rachel and Travis presented an updated version of the economic and demographic statistics of the Six County region

Timeline – Any additional events that happened –

- Jason mentioned the “Dust Bowl” and the fact that during that era people were selling off cattle and leaving the area due to no water.
- Thought to go back to 1900 – 1920 to include the homesteader act (separate chart)
- 1980's CRP – Sod Busting
- Phillips County– late 30's the Pegasus Gold Mine shut down affecting employment within the county.

Most of the data used in this presentation was obtained from a USGS study of the CMR area. This is the only resource that breaks the information out by County that has been found to date.

Number of Cattle per county slide

- Drought
- High Interest Rates
- Sod Busting

Questions from the group: Where are these figures from? Is this from number of calves sold, or number slaughtered, or a census of landowners in the county? Rachel and Travis will look into this and report at next meeting.

#### BLM AUM's by County Slide

- Adam mentioned that the numbers on this slide are based on the number of AUM's billed to permittees each year. However, this may not equate to the number of AUMs actually grazed on the allotments due to drought, etc

Maps that have been produced of the area

#### Landscape Intactness

- What does intactness mean? Is it simply not plowed? Is CRP land counted as intact? Rachel will ask Joe Smith (graduate student at U of M who prepared the maps) what defines "intact".

John Chase: mentioned that 3 or 4 years ago the group was looking at an Atlas project of the area, and he mentioned that perhaps now is the time for that type of a project.

Bill Milton: mentioned that the Atlas project was expensive and that people within the group are being able to come up with more data and better data through other references.

Jason Holt: brought up Green Space – all you need to have is a pdf file to share information across many platforms. Thus the group would be able to get the data out there for people to see.

Ron Moody: Brought up that the group had mentioned at an earlier meeting that they wanted to know what would be a good indicator of quality of life within the area. Perhaps the economic data could be a start to assessing the quality of life in the Six County Region.

Draft Work Plan:

Bill Milton: Reminded everyone to keep the 3-part goals in mind when creating the work plan.

The 3 part goals for the group:

**Question 1: Describe the quality of life you would like to see be predominant in the region in 5 to 10 years.**

We want this region to maintain a diversified economy within which a prosperous agriculture industry is sustained and local communities are prosperous with stable populations. We desire an atmosphere where agencies, local government, NGOs, and citizens work together to create positive outcomes for the community and citizens: focusing on common ground, mutual respect, and community-based decision making, where people are committed to the working group and access to public land is ensured for both the public and producers.

**Question 2 – What kind of production\*\*\* will be needed to sustain this quality of life?**

A diversity of unique goods and services to support economic and social values will need to be produced from a working landscape that maintains its scenic value, healthy soils, and ecological integrity. We must also identify and implement best management practices that integrate local ecological knowledge,

succession planning in all entities, local working groups to address challenges, incentives to practice conservation, steady tax base to support infrastructure and responsible, well-educated citizens.

*\*\*\* There were several suggestions to exchange “production” in the question to “economics” or “commodities”. This question was posed by Bill, so I am not going to implement that change at this time.*

**Question 3 – What does the landscape need to look like to obtain your production?**

We desire a landscape that provides habitat for diverse and healthy wildlife populations, where further conversion of native prairie is discouraged, and where the needs of natural resource dependent industries are balanced with conservation. In short, healthy agriculture lands cooperatively managed for the benefit of the resource, wildlife, industry, and community.

Bill broke up attendees into groups of 5. He then explained the rules for the breakout sessions. A draft Work Plan was handed out and participants were asked to fill in the activities needed to accomplish the projects and the timeline and deliverables for each project.

For a full report of the tasks associated with each project, please see the DRAFT Work Plan document that can be found at: <http://missouririvercouncil.info/projects/cmr-community-working-group/>

**Breakout Group Reports:**

The working group decided to create a committee to provide structure for a conversation about bison. The group is asking for volunteers to serve on the committee, so if you are interested, please contact Rachel before the next meeting which will be August 25<sup>th</sup> in Fort Peck. This committee will begin operation after the next meeting, but will remain open to people who want to be a part of the committee.

The working group will facilitate the networking of partners and support for weed projects.

The working group will explore the economic impacts of tourism in the 6-County region.

The working group will promote succession planning for landowners through support of locally-organized workshops and seminars.

**Next Meeting Information:**

August 25<sup>th</sup> – Fort Peck

October 6 – Jordan

December - Malta