

MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM THE CMR COMMUNITY WORKING GROUP!

I was tasked with creating a presentation that celebrated the past successes of the CMR CWG and looked toward the future as part of the agenda for the Zortman meeting. Unfortunately, the weather did not cooperate and we were unable to gather in Zortman and enjoy the hot apple cider and cake that was planned.

Still, as I was preparing this presentation, I was struck by how much the group has accomplished in the past 5 years since its initial meeting in Jordan in 2010. If you disagree with me, I invite you to view the following presentation and remember that we often do not notice growth on the inside. Just the way that we do not realize that our children are growing before our eyes until we look at old photographs, I believe that those of us most closely connected to the group may lose focus of the accomplishments. Furthermore, many may not be aware of the partnerships formed and projects underway that are only made possible through the relationships formed by the CMR CWG. With that, please bear with my Christmas spirit, and enjoy with the humor intended:



BEST WISHES FOR A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Rachel Frost

CMR Community Working Group

☞ *Original Goal: Influence the management of the CMR to improve the vitality of the surrounding communities and landscape.*

☞ *Still the main focus of the group....
VITALITY OF SURROUNDING
COMMUNITIES AND LANDSCAPE,
realizing that we cannot optimize one while
ignoring the other.*

While we often wrestle with difficult issues that can be contentious, the group has maintained the ability to hold these conversations with respect for one another. We can do this because of the focus on the things we can all agree on.....the health and vitality of the CMR NWR, the greater regional landscape, and the surrounding communities.

Ghosts of the Past

• **Auspicious foundations**

- “CMR Stakeholders Group will review the CMR Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Habitat Management Plans”
- “Group will provide responses, advice, and recommendations to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as appropriate. ...and other agencies as needed.”

There was some suspicion of the group at its formation. It was thought that the group was to be a “watchdog” of the CMR and other agencies. While we have worked to have local input considered in all areas of management, the group has been more of a communications vector than a watchdog.

Mistrust and plain old dislike of other members was also common at the early meetings. I’ve heard you could cut the tension with a knife at times. However, repeated opportunities to visit and discuss our mutual appreciation of the region and its resources has largely replaced this with mutual respect, or at least tolerance ☺. Look at the Circle meeting where we were able to intelligently discuss the Bison EIS and provide meaningful feedback to shape comments submitted on the document.

Good Ghosts of the Past



- **Successes of CMR CWG.....**
- **CMR Water Compact**
- **Improved communication**
- **Tours and on-the-ground education**
- **Spin-off projects**
- **Rangeland Monitoring Roundup**

Sage Grouse Committee

- *Purpose of the committee: Bring all the agency, non-profit, and landowner partners together to identify solutions that work for the people, the land, and the bird.*
- **Conservation menu with landowner scenarios**
- **Work with State plan to communicate local needs**
- **Rangeland monitoring efforts**
- **Work with agencies to effectively deal with new standards**



The CMR CWG does have past accomplishments to celebrate. The successful passage of the CMR Water Compact was facilitated by this group and the relationships developed among participants. Because of this, the CMR Compact did not end up mired in political mud for years. I have heard countless times about the improved communication and relationships amongst CMR Staff, permittees and landowners surrounding the Refuge. This has transpired because of improved relationships, which take time and effort to build.

However, once those relationships have been built, the possibilities for working together are endless. Several sub-groups of CMR CWG members are working to solve specific issues that have been identified in the region. The CMR Sage Grouse Committee was formed to address local issues that affect the sagegrouse in the Six-County Region of Montana. The diverse membership of the group enabled us to identify key needs for landowners and conservationists to make better decisions regarding land management, document the impacts to habitat from those decisions, and understand how to deal with the new standards imposed by the BLM Resource Management Plans.

The SG Committee is creating a conservation menu that is designed to provide landowners with the full gamut of conservation tools available to them from federal, state, local, and private resources. This menu will be coupled with local contacts and information resources to help people make the best decisions for the land and their families that live on the land. We hope to have the menu ready for distribution by late summer 2016.

Montana Rangelands Partnership



- Public-private partnership comprised of local, state, and national organizations
- Grant funding for two full-time rangeland resource technicians
- Develop individual ranch management plans
 - initiate rangeland monitoring and
 - support continued monitoring efforts
- Anticipated start dates in March of 2016

Montana Saltcedar Team



- **Over 25 federal, state, local and private partners come together to collectively combat saltcedar**
- **Coordinated treatment of Seven Blackfoot drainage**
- **Agency partnerships**
- **Private landowner and county cooperation**
- **Leveraging funding**

The Rangeland Monitoring Roundup (Monitorfest as it is still called by some) was a great event attracting over 50 people to the CMR to learn how different agencies and private individuals monitored rangeland. This event was sparked from conversations about the need for good monitoring to determine if the suggested management was actually working on the landscape. Continued conversations resulted in grant funds being obtained to hire 2 rangeland technicians to assist in rangeland monitoring. These positions are currently open and we hope to have employees by March 2016. Additionally, conversations are ongoing to identify common monitoring methods that can be employed across all agencies and work to assess land health, not just habitat for a single species.

Weeds are a common issue to all landowners, and saltcedar is a plague to the shores of Fort Peck, the banks of the Musselshell, and other tributaries of the Missouri River. Conversations among CMR CWG Members prompted the formation of the Montana Saltcedar Team which is working together to conduct watershed-based treatments of saltcedar and develop a landscape approach to controlling the invasive tree in the Missouri River watershed, thus protecting wildlife habitat and recreational value.

CMR CWG Future...

- Continue to be a major communication forum for the region
- Steady revenue, matching plan
- Uniform monitoring language and standards
- Strategic conservation plan for the region

*Wishing you all a very
Merry Christmas and
Happy New Year!*

By now, I hope you agree with me that the CMR CWG, (which is the people), have accomplished a great deal in the past 5 years. We should take a moment to relish the accomplishments of the past, even as we look forward to the potential of the future. The possibilities are endless as we continue to build on existing relationships and develop new ones. As we move forward with the possibility of developing a strategic conservation plan for the region, we can assure ourselves that we are heading in the right direction if we keep looking back to our original purpose. By focusing on what we can agree on, and respecting each other, we can continue to be “*A partnership of diverse interests working to ensure vitality of both CMR NWR and the surrounding communities.*”

Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Your Coordinator,
Rachel Frost