

CMR Community Working Group Meeting Summary

Where: Flatwillow Hall, Winnett Montana

Opening: 10: 15 AM

Attendance: 50

Self-Introduction & Grounding Question: Bill gave an overview of the group and why he does the grounding question. As a community, how do you relate to the issues that come up. Scale of 1 to 10 your confidence level of the group getting things done. Most people gave their level between a 4 and 10.

CMR CWG Committee Reports:

- **Montana Saltcedar Team:** Rachel Frost reported exploring some projects have met with weed coordinators in the six county area prioritize the project area looking for funding in the fall for projects.
- **Winnett ACES:** Looking at an affiliation with RSA, Soil Health workshops, and operational/financial workshop follow up.
- **CMR Water Compact:** May?? everything was signed off on and its done. No one got a 100% of what they wanted but it was a compromise. Priority water right date is May ?? 2015.
- **CMR CCP-HMP Update:** CCP for their wetland management program there was a public meeting about a year ago and the plan is done and they are working on getting it published into the federal register for public comment but there is a delay in DC. HMP struggling on how to get those going as they are down 50% in staffing since 2010. Kicked off the HMP last December 2017, one in March 2018 and will have another in July 2018 these are all internal with no partners included. Paul feels that they have met the NEPA requirements within their plans and that they will add partners to some of the projects. He noted that since the HMP's are step down plans of the CCP that they do not require public input with those. Looking at the whole refuge in an ecological landscape that will be broken into ecologically significant units (65 to 9) now they are looking at the technical handle on what the a landscape they are handling and what they look at on a macroscale. Practical management plan not an aspirational plan like the original CCP. They think that there will only be 5 or 6 projects to do over 10 years such as restoration. Have not transition into what they will be doing for projects. It was asked what type of wildlife to be managed. Paul noted that it is primary bird species, but that there are different areas that have vast differences in habitat. It was asked if they expect their current staff to be at the same level. Paul replied that it will at best be at the current level but it is feared that it could be reduced.
- **Prairie Communities in Action:** Julia Haggerty, MSU Professor – wrapping up there CD visits and will be in Winnett this evening to visit with those who would like to see more on what is going on.
- **Ranchers Stewardship Alliance Conservation Committee:** Kelsey Malloy was awarded a second grant from NFWF so they are looking to hire an executive director and they are continuing their projects. Perri noted that they were able to put statics on their first round of projects and the landowner match is roughly at 60% to date. Also hiring an administrative assistant and more information visit their website. They have improved roughly about 8,000 – 9,000 acres in their area.

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- **BLM Status of Plans:** John gave an update on the planning process. He reported that they are done with the planning and that Montana avoided going right back into the planning process due to concerns. They are addressing those through memorandums on how to interpret the plan language. Noted that there are 5 different offices that have plans that were updated and that they were instructional memorandum on how to interpret those. They are making some technical guides to help interpret the management plans, and there is another instructional memorandum coming out in the next couple of weeks to help define the use of those plans and to meet those objectives. Aim protocol (Assessment, Inventory and Monitoring) will be focused on and not changed. It was asked why Montana was the only one to use this process and how will it affects the outcomes over the next ten years.

Lunch was served at 11:45 am

Conservation Options for Landowners: Introduction and purpose of the meeting – Leo Barthelmess

- **CCAA's for sage grouse and grassland Birds** – Kelsey Molloy, Jim Magee, & Ranchers – Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances promotes sustainable lands and promotes conservation on non-federal lands. Does not have to be a candidate species. Provides assurances to the landowner that no further regulatory obligations will be required. Has a take permit included. Conservation actions that must reduce or eliminates all threats on their lands. (stats of presentation) Montana has 4 CCAA's Arctic Grayling, Sage Grouse, XX . In the Big Hole the graylings habitat is primarily in private lands. Pete Frick, producer in the Big Hole mentioned that CCAA's are also about building relationships. Have been able to make many improvements to the land over the years. Without the partner relationships and funding these would not have been possible. Big items were to manage their water in relation to the water flows in the Big Hole River, and they are to manage their riparian grazing and created grazing plans for their ranch. He has felt that his day to day management increased a little bit but has not impacted or created hardships in the overall operations. Site plans are 10 years and the CCAA is 20 years. Probably about 8 million in funding since 2006. There were relations already established with the landowners in the area they were started in the 1999 and held their first meetings in 2000. Big Hole 86 main stem miles but have a lot of tributary miles as well. Approximately 200 miles in riparian assessments have been done. Kelsey Sage grouse and grassland songbirds - permits leased to the TNC January 2018 TNC, enrolls the individual landowners those four birds (from presentation) require a variety of habitat structure. All four require large landscapes but are compatible with livestock grazing. The birds tend to have habitat overlap in areas. Twelve key threats with the number one being habitat loss or fragmentation. Number one conservation measure is not to subdivide, develop or convert habitat on the property. (maintain continuous habitat) Currently working with 6 or 7 landowners will have the first one signed up in the next month or so. CCA are done on federal lands in cooperation with CCAA's on private lands.

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- **NRCS- SGI and NRCS Farm Bill programs** - Kyle Tackett – Ranch sustainability, Poster “conserve our western roots” SGI 2.0 started in 2015 ending in 2018 directed \$211 million was state based. Four areas

- Cropland seeding back to grass land -
- Conifer encroachment
- Mesic Areas
- Grazing –

Programs

- EQIP & CSP programs – funding
- Easements – ALE - Ag Land Programs - partners hold easements
- Easements – WRE – Wetland Reserve Program (restoration) NRCS holds the easement
- CTA- Conservation Technical Assistance working with producers to help address their needs- no money changes hands.
- SGI – regulatory predictability

Soil Health – on rangeland

- Plant diversity above and below the ground structure
- Minimize disturbance- maximize recovery time
- Keep plants growing throughout year
- Keep it covered –actively growing plants and litter

Drought Resilience

- Into wetter areas
- New techniques in restoration
- Grazing system

Sustain People

- **FWP Habitat Programs** – Catherine Wightman – Changing from programs to strategies – support sustainable systems on the ground
 - Cost-share opportunities for marginal cropland
 - Provide up to 75% cost share
 - Keep fencing, stock tanks and pipelines, wells and pumps
 - Seed mix and seeding activities
 - Term agreement – asked for
 - Public access – recreational access at some level – landowner sets up terms
 - Range infrastructure cost share – perimeter fencing
 - Rangeland Restoration project
 - 30 year Conservation Lease – no conversion, public access, one-time payment of \$30 and acre
 - Permanent Easement
 - Maintainable wildlife habitat
 - Grazing management plan

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- Public asses
- Appraised Fair market value
- **Mitigation through MSGOT** – Carolyn Sime – New group on the block started in 2015 Mitigation is the balance to some of the concerns such as energy development.
 - Strategy includes
 - EO in 2015
 - Goal
 - Maintain viable sage grouse populations
 - Principles
 - All hands, all lands, all threats
 - Work collaboratively across all lands
 - Develop where least impacts
 - Stewardship Account Grants
 - Eligible projects
 - Conifer reduction
 - GIST
 - Other details
 - Application sponsor
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 - State/ MSGOT can't
 - Buy land
 - Purchase water rights
 - Mitigation – sale – balance
 - Creating conservation credits that can be used to have development elsewhere.
 - Rangeland is an asset
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- **Speaker Panel Q&A** -

Break Out Sessions:

1. What are the top 3 challenges threatening the future of your operation or your program/ conservation strategy?
2. What tools are currently missing from the toolbox that could change the way you think about the future?
3. What one specific thing can the CMR CWG do to further improve communication and collaboration between landowners and agencies to accomplish our three part goal?

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Group #1

1. Budgeting and staffing, volunteerism and partnerships to help out with staffing, perception of agriculture public scrutiny of processes. Federal regulations –
2. Streamlined system that gives you a direct contact, streamline communication, carrying input from local level to the federal for local input- next steps
3. Communication – internship – mentoring program putting a landowner with new employees (NGO & Agencies), students etc. This can go both ways.

Group #2

1. Ability to find and hire good people to work, health care – producer perspective Agency – Losing relevance – large population of urban folks losing interest in wildlife management.
2. Failed
3. Continued focus on habitat conservation – specifically sage grouse ecosystem- make the tent bigger- career fair style event.

Group #3

1. Funding – proper staffing and managing collaborations Land prices preclude economical operations, heirs
2. Failed
3. Dissemination of information – business card format to have link to website information on it

Group #4

1. Uncertainty in funding from the agency - commodities are not keeping up – time - Difficult to find time to access the tools to find the most beneficial to the person.
2. No compartmentalizing, finding ways to get good labor/help
3. Video of recognizing Dean and Paul and their importance of grasslands.

Group #5

1. Funding/ Staffing/ Labor concerns – Opportunity to walk in other shoes
2. Range assessment of large areas of land then make them readily available, toolbox – like Arc GIS built into the websites.
3. Keep networking

Group #6

1. Next generation/ transition successful - continuing to justify what they are doing and continuing to ask for funding. –
2. Putting together directories of contacts
3. Intern program – create a landowner travel fund to increase landowner participation in meetings.

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Wrap Up: Rachel noted that there is a good comradery and people enjoy each other – purposeful relationship building. Building relationships does not fall into a metric although it is incredibly important. Real communication technical resources and have a person on the other end of the land. How do we mentor new agency folks? Welcome wagons – outreach ? possible CD's avenue for this.

Future meeting topic:

- Fire assessment fees being looked at in the legislature
- Federal agencies protocols on fire supersession.

Next Meeting date: September 27th in Malta

Adjournment: 5:05 pm