

Lincoln County Firesafe Council Meeting Notes

Location: Libby Fire Department (in person) and Microsoft Teams Conference Call (virtual)

Date: March 16th, 2023

Time: 9:00 AM – 10:50 AM

Note Taker: Jacob Jeresek

In Attendance: Jacob Jeresek, Doug Turman, Gary Kedish, Heidi McRoberts, Jennifer Nelson, Marcel Getz, Jeremy Rank, Logan Sandman, Dean Whitney, Tom Lane, Brian Ressel, Danny Lemer, Nikia Hernandez, Harmony Burow, Seth Carbonari, RJ McDole, Dustin Webb, and Mark Peck

*Red font indicates action items.

New/Old Business:

- Brainstorming Session on Recommended Next Forest Service Agency Project Area (All)
 - The brainstorming session identified several areas across Lincoln County as potential recommended Categorical Exclusion (CE) project areas. These included the Pipe Creek and Kootenai River Road area, Primary Line of Defense fuelbreak from Granite Creek to Highway 2, the Bull Lake Corridor, McConnell Mountain, the Fortine/Stryker/Trego area, and the Yaak Highway Corridor.
 - Of these potential projects, the following were recommended based on the following priorities: 1) Primary Line of Defense fuelbreak from Granite Creek to Highway 2; 2) the Bull Lake Corridor; 3) Pipe Creek and Kootenai River Road area; 4) and the Fortine/Stryker/Trego area.
- Private Ownership StoryMap Mapping (Logan)
 - With the potential for the DNRC to be awarded a Community Wildfire Defense Grant (CWDG), there is a desire to track where private land treatments have occurred and create a StoryMap to help tell the story in Lincoln County. Logan would like to create a mapping system to help identify these areas. He has talked to Nick Youngstrom and he is willing to take on this effort likely beginning this summer which should take 1 to 2 months to create. To create a useful product, Logan polled the committee looking for a list of items people found useful.
 - Some of the ideas identified were to use Montana cadastral to identify parcels, identify a timeframe for how long treatment effectiveness is maintained, have the ability to differentiate treatments completed by various agencies/landowners, identify emergency evacuation routes, use current addressing information, identify other non-private treatments and proximity to those treatments, utilize satellite imagery to identify which areas have been previously treated or not, track the dates of treatments, display where active grant/Targeted Implementation Plan (TIP) areas are, and to utilize the home assessment program to identify which areas are treated or not.
 - **At the next Firesafe Council meeting, we would like to have Nick and the fire chiefs present to identify needs and the end result of the StoryMap.**
- New Agency Projects (Forest Service, DNRC, NRCS, Lincoln County, Timber Companies)
 - Lincoln County submitted a project proposal for city and county municipal parcels around Troy, Kootenai Vista, the Libby Water treatment plant, Skidale, the Lincoln County Landfill, and Pipe Creek.

- Grant Updates and Planned Grant Applications (Jennifer and Brian)
 - NRCS is starting to see which projects are funded in 2023. So far, Edna Creek has received approximately \$500,000 which is in its last year of funding. There have not been any allocations yet for Glenn Lake or Fire Adapted Fortine, but Brian is optimistic. NRCS is working on assembling contracts. Also, NRCS is receiving Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding which will likely have multiple rounds of funding each year versus annually.
 - Lincoln County is wrapping up Kootenai Forests to Rivers Initiative (KFRI) which all work must be completed by the end of April. Jennifer did receive one more interested landowner which she will look at the property this week.
 - Rabbit Tracts Montana Forest Action Plan (MFAP) grant is on track to be completed when the grant expires at the end of September. Work remaining to be completed is some pile burning on DNRC land and the Forest Service roadside mastication contract.
 - Lincoln County is focusing on the Western States grant in the Swede Mountain and Farm to Market areas south of Libby. This grant has approximately \$260,000 which expires in a couple of years.
 - Lincoln County will resume work on the 16-acre Insect and Disease grant at J Niels Park when the new chip plant starts taking material this summer.
 - The Island Lake MFAP grant is kicking off with solicitation letters being sent to landowners from DNRC and Thompson Contracting Inc. The DNRC has received a half dozen interest calls from landowners. Jeremy will start looking at properties once snow melts in this area. Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks and Green Diamond Resource Company have contracts to begin work in this area.
 - Montana DNRC has a hazardous fuels reduction grant in the Othorp Lake and Barnaby Lake areas. This grant is to treat landowner properties around these areas. Contracts to complete this work should be awarded soon.
 - DNRC was informed they should hear the results of the CWDG grant by the end of March.
- Joint Chief's Update (Brian and Gary)
 - NRCS received the second-year funding which approved approximately \$500,000 in the Parmenter Creek area. NRCS received more interest than funding, so Brian requested more money in 2023 to fund all interested properties. NRCS is currently soliciting landowners for 2024 projects.
 - The Forest Service received approximately \$95,000 in 2023 which was well short of what was requested. Work in 2023 will be in two units of the Hoodoo project area as Ripley remains under litigation. Unit 16 in Hoodoo was dropped from the proposal due to changed conditions on the ground.
- Kootenai Complex Update (Nikia)
 - The Kootenai Complex project committed to treating approximately 7,200 acres beyond the Kootenai National Forest (KNF) normal program of work over the next 3 years. Last year, the KNF committed to an additional 900 acres which was met and exceeded by slightly. This year, the KNF committed to an additional 3,500 acres and are currently on track to accomplish 6,000 acres and up to 10,000 acres depending on prescribed fire windows. This year, over 10 contracts are committed for approximately \$1.2 million to complete road work packages and fuels reduction contracts with many of these contracts being awarded to local contractors. Current projections for 2024 is the KNF expects to have another good year exceeding what was planned. Project success is a testament of the new partnerships, relationships, and agreements developed as well as all the hard work everyone is committed to.

Round Robin:

- The public hearings for the Lincoln County CWPP are March 22, 2023 in Eureka at 1:00 pm and March 29, 2023 in Libby at 1:00 pm.
- The burn permit subcommittee is meeting at 1:00 pm on March 17, 2023 to discuss the website and addressing needs for the rest of Lincoln County for the website to be active by May 1, 2023.
- Montana DNRC Libby Unit is interviewing 3 candidates for a third GNA forester position and hope to have a decision by the middle of next week.
- Montana DNRC Plains Unit is hiring a GNA forester with the hope that the position can cover the West Lolo and Cabinet Ranger District. If the capacity is too much, this may lead to another GNA forester position being added at this location.
- Montana DNRC is waiting to hear back from the Bureau on standardized home assessment training.
- Montana DNRC was approached by the Em Kayan and Crystal Lake subdivisions to complete a community assessment to maintain their Firesafe rating.
- Mark provided an update on the potential chip plant at the Port Authority. Currently, the agreement with the Port Authority has been signed to start developing the site. One of the investors, Levi Chef, will be here Saturday to meet with Noble Excavating to discuss cleanup of the property. The initial phase is a wood biomass plant that accepts sawdust, dirty chips, and material to a 1-inch top to chip and ship to South Korea and Japan. Once this process is approved, the plant will shift to pellets. There are also discussions of adding a small diameter sawmill. If this goes through, the mill will require approximately 200,000 tons per year of small diameter material with 40% of the biproduct going to the chip plant. The concept of the sawmill is a green mill that ships the product to another mill for drying and planing.
- Mark is putting together a letter of support for the Norman McCedar project. The letter highlights all the different work that has been completed in Lincoln County and across the state beforehand and tying the project to this work. He reflected that it was great to be able to tell the story.
- Montana DNRC is meeting tomorrow with the Fire Adapted Communities out of the Bureau to identify a targeted marketing strategy for outreach if the CWDG grant is awarded.

Adjourned