

## *Lincoln County Firesafe Council Notes*

Location – Zoom Conference Call

Date- March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Time-9:00 AM – 11:15 AM

Note Taker: Jacob Jeresek

In Attendance: Jacob Jeresek, Steve Lauer, Matt Chumbley, Jeremy Rank, Jennifer Nelson, Logan Sandman, Gary Kedish, Marcel Getz, Brent Teske, Ali Ulwelling, Derek Luchik, Dean Whitney, Josh Letcher, Brian Ressel

Action items are in red font.

### New/Old Business:

- EQIP and Kootenai Rivers to Forest Initiative (KFRI) payment systems and rates (Derek)
  - NRCS administered EQIP has a different prescription and payment system than Lincoln County administered KFRI grants. EQIP has a more flexible prescription and is often a better financial deal for landowners. NRCS would like to try and make these more consistent but due to the grant rules, it is unlikely to occur. NRCS would also like the EQIP prescription to be more consistent to the KFRI prescription. The County really wants fuels breaks around homes and access/egress routes. It was suggested that the Firesafe Council provide a letter of support urging more alignment between the two programs. There is concern that the NRCS will be making all the changes to adapt to the County's specifications without County adaptation.
  - Jennifer and Derek will draft a letter to change the payment rate around egress routes and provide to the council for feedback.
- Grant Updates (Jennifer)
  - KFRI is picking up in the Bobtail and Hutton Drive areas. This proposal started as a focused area, but they are selecting people with needs throughout the County.
  - Western States returned the signed documents back to the County. Have a couple of landowners participating in the program currently.
  - Montana Forest Action Plan (MFAP) has notified applicants that they can expect to hear some information by the end of the month whether they were awarded or not. Next week there is another review board looking at the project proposals.
  - Joint Chief's Fiscal Year 22 request for proposals should be out in the next couple of weeks. The deadline for these proposals will be in June sometime. Brian had a de-brief with the NRCS on what we can do better with a Fiscal Year 22 proposal bulleted below.
    - Brian asked why were there no Montana proposals accepted? We felt we had good proposals but was there politics involved at higher levels or was it due to weaknesses in our proposal?
    - Joint Chief's has three objectives of fire, watershed, wildlife. In our last proposal we did not do a good job of elaborating on watershed and wildlife objectives.
    - Maps included in the proposal were too busy/cluttered and they would like to see maps

that are easier to read with less information crammed onto one map.

- The Forest Service has a writing style that is technical in nature. It was suggested that we need to make this easier to read and understand for the average person.
  - Proposals are tied closely to Forest Action Plan and firesheds which we displayed.
  - Not all projects within the proposal were NEPA cleared which hindered our proposal even though this is not a requirement.
  - Our proposal did not do well meeting the monitoring and evaluation requirements. We need to do a better job describing the effectiveness of treatments.
  - **A Committee will reassemble soon to start working on FY22 proposal.**
- Discussion of HB 594 (Jennifer)
    - A bill was introduced to the Montana Senate to exempt DNRC grant monies on private land to forgo MEPA. This bill would exempt the DNRC from completing MEPA on private lands. If this doesn't get passed, DNRC will have complete MEPA on projects submitted for funding through the MFAP. This could delay MFAP projects by several months. This will go to the senate floor on Friday. People can submit comments on the montana.gov website.
  - Montana Burn Permit Website Update (Marcel)
    - On March 2 there was a meeting with Megan Gretch to establish the burn permit website and have a launch date of March 15<sup>th</sup>. After a quick discussion, it was determined that this date was not feasible. The County Health Department has money and a desire to start now but there is also a desire to not confuse the public. Decision was made to make the official switch this fall.
    - Jennifer met with Lincoln County Commissioners on March 3 to request funding for the website. They are supportive of the program and would like to see it operational by fall. They also feel it is important to keep burn permits a free program. Kathy Hooper stated that the air pollution control grant would pay for permits issued within the air pollution control district but has hesitations outside of this area. The County Health Department sees the website as a cost savings because personnel don't need to issue permits, but they do not see value in paying costs for permits issued outside of the air pollution control district. Jerry Bennett wants the Forest Service to pay for all permits issued outside of the air pollution control district.
    - The Forest Service expressed that this is a Montana State burn permit and that they are doing a service for the State of Montana by issuing burn permits. The Forest Service feels that either the State of Montana or Lincoln County should pay for the costs associated with the website.
    - **The burn permit subcommittee will reconvene on Tuesday March 30<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 to determine a payment plan moving forward and a deadline to have the website operational.**
  - Fire Adapted Kootenai Website Development Workshop (Marcel)
    - There was a lot of discussion and good progress on identifying needs for the Fire Adapted Kootenai website but the committee felt it would be more efficient to establish a subcommittee to work on development. **This new subcommittee will meet on Wednesday March 31<sup>st</sup> at 10:30.**
    - Both of the Fire Adapted Kootenai and Lincoln County Firesafe mission statements need to be updated. **Marcel will draft mission statements for the council to provide feedback.**
    - The contact information for organizations needs to be updated (USFS, NRCS, State, County, etc.) **Organization leads are to provide Marcel with an updated contact list.**
  - Action Items from past meetings
    - There is concern that with the new burn permit website, the County and local fire departments will not be able to inspect management burns before a permit is issued. The burn permit subcommittee was tasked with looking into ways that inspections can still be performed. This will be discussed at the next subcommittee meeting on March 30<sup>th</sup>.
    - There is little knowledge of Forest Service projects in the Eureka area and the Council would like to have a better understanding to be prepared for applying for grants, etc. **Gary will discuss**

with the Forest Leadership Team about having a Forest Service representative from the Eureka area attend monthly Council meetings.

- Gary will continue to investigate CE authorities that may be utilized for **Precommercial Thinning and fuels reduction projects outside of timber production**. There are options available which the Forest Service is starting to use but there is little NEPA capacity to take on these projects outside of large landscape environmental planning at this current time.

Adjourned