

Lincoln County Firesafe Council Meeting Notes

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

Date: April 20th, 2023

Time: 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Note Taker: Jacob Jeresek

In Attendance: Jacob Jeresek, Ally Talbot, Ali Ulwelling, Jeremy Rank, Marcel Getz, Nate Gassmann, Gary Kedish, Dean Whitney, Dustin Webb, Cory Farmer, Jennifer Nelson, Brian Ressel, Steve Lauer, Brent Teske, Sam Martin, Nikia Hernandez, and RJ McDole

*Red font indicates action items.

New/Old Business:

- Quarterly Lincoln County Project Updates to Agency Representatives (All)
 - Norman McCedar was granted emergency action approval. The project was previously scoped with incorrect information. This project will be reworked and rescoped soon. A question was raised as to what the emergency action grants. Basically put, it grants an accelerated NEPA process.
 - Granite Snowshoes 1,000 GNA project is now looking at using the wildfire resiliency Categorical Exclusion (CE) versus the fuelbreak CE. The fuelbreak CE limits treatments to within 1,000 feet of a linear feature such as a road. After treatment opportunity identification, there were multiple examples where slivers would be left untreated immediately adjacent to private property due to the 1,000-foot limit. The wildfire resiliency CE does not have this limitation. Line officers will decide on the CE authority to use soon.
 - Knotty Pine had a preliminary injunction hearing yesterday which went well. The district is optimistic they will hear soon on the ruling of the injunction requested.
 - OU3 Jackson is very close to releasing what is proposed utilizing the CERCLA authority.
 - Pleasant Pheasant is having a public scoping meeting on June 29th. **The district is requesting the Firesafe Council to attend with the Fire Adapted Kootenai (FAK) trailer to demonstrate support for the project.**
 - There are several additional timber sales across the forest planning to be offered in Fiscal Year 2023 including Old Dodge GNA for approximately 100 acres, Edna Fortine for approximately 1,400 acres, Sunday for approximately 1,100 acres, and a couple of GNA small sales around Eureka.
 - DNRC has four active timber sales under contract. There are an additional two timber sales being prepared now located in the bottom of McKillop Creek and Cripple Horse Creek. The DNRC is also looking at a new sale area up Canyon Creek.
 - Stimson will be completing a little bit more work in the Rabbit Tracts Montana Forest Action Plan (MFAP) grant area beyond what was originally proposed in the grant. This work includes additional pre-commercial thinning and planting.
 - The Lincoln County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) was adopted and signed. It can now be used for projects across Lincoln County.
- Air Curtain Burning in the Libby Outdoor Burning Control Area (LOBCA) (Jennifer and Dustin)
 - There was some miscommunication with the use of an air curtain burner within the Forest Service Skidale project. Montana DEQ does not require permitting or air quality approval

- for air curtain burner use. Forest Service policy does not require a burn plan because it is considered industrial use.
 - With the increasing use of air curtain burners, especially in the LOBCA, there is concern from the county that individuals will burn what is not allowed such as stumps and woody materials soaked in creosote. Additionally, because air quality approval is not required, there is concern that smoke will impact town. Lincoln County dispatch received several complaints from the public with the air curtain burning on the Skidale project.
 - **In the future, there is a desire to see more communication between individuals and the Lincoln County DEQ when using an air curtain burner within the LOBCA.**
- Grant Updates and Planned Grant Applications (NRCS, Lincoln County, DNRC)
 - Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is completing a lot of spring burning. Also, NRCS is working on completing a 130-acre piece around Glen Lakes. Within the Libby Surround Joint Chief's project, they are waiting for spring breakup to cease before moving into the Libby area. Within the Targeted Implementation Plan (TIP) program, NRCS has 65 active participants. Brian will be participating in the Kootenai National Forest General Management Review highlighting all the work in Fortine and Edna Creek TIP areas. NRCS hired a new employee to replace Christine Burke who accepted a new position. This employee will begin in June. NRCS is no longer taking applications from landowners in the Edna Creek TIP area with the grant sunsetting soon.
 - Kootenai Forests to Rivers Initiative grant will end at the end of April with all work completed in the next couple of months. Under this grant, the Mackey burn of about 300 piles of scotch pine was completed recently.
 - Western States is outreaching for applicants in the Swede, McMillan, and Highway 2 areas.
 - Lincoln County applied for a landscape grant that consisted of scattered City and County parcels around Libby and Troy. The grant was not awarded because it was not a competitive proposal under the landscape grant application. DNRC contacted Lincoln County asking if the Community Wildfire Defense Grant (CWDG) could take this work on instead. As a result, DNRC will take this on as one of the first projects with the CWDG.
 - Othorp Lake is active with five landowners consisting of approximately 120 acres.
 - Barnaby Lake applied and was approved for funding. However, the landowner has started the project by themselves, and work is not to expectations. As a result, DNRC may not award this grant.
 - Alford Lake was awarded a grant several years ago and will not be able to spend all the money. This money was returned to the DNRC and Jennifer is awarding the remaining funds to Stimson for additional work in the Rabbit Tracts MFAP area.
 - Island Lake MFAP grant has 10 participating landowners with contracts submitted but the contracting office is overwhelmed, and it is unknown when these may be awarded.
 - The CWDG was awarded fully. Due to some misinformation in media outlets, Marcel is creating a CWDG talking point document. With this grant, the DNRC is hiring seven employees which has been approved by human resources. Also, with the grant, Jeremy presented a landowner prioritization rating scale to the council soliciting feedback. The idea behind this is to reduce and/or eliminate landowners from grant shopping.
 - DNRC started their remaining work in the Rabbit Tracts MFAP project. They are receiving a lot of help from other DNRC units and hope to be completed by the end of May.
- Joint Chief's Update (Brian and Gary)
 - The Forest Service is working on budget requests for Fiscal Year 2024 and accomplishment reporting for Fiscal Year 2023. Hoodoo unit 49 is out for contract solicitation with contracts due in mid-May. Implementation should begin soon after the contract is awarded. The Hoodoo project will be completed when this unit is done.

- NRCS obligated \$615,000 of new projects in 2023. This brings the total obligated in two years to \$1.2 million. This year is the last year for landowners to sign up with the primary focus being on properties on the west and southwest side of Libby.
- Kootenai Complex Update (Nikia)
 - Within the Kootenai Complex, the forest is currently showing roughly 2,600 acres above and beyond the normal program of work. For Fiscal Year 2023, there is approximately \$1.8 million in 18 separate contracts with about half of those currently awarded. Projections anticipate there will be roughly \$2.5 to \$3 million in contracts this year. Most contracts awarded to date have gone to local contractors. The GNA program has awarded two contracts this year for approximately \$100,000 with another soon to be awarded. The forest plans to commit more funds this year into the GNA program. At this current pace, the Kootenai Complex could be upwards of 10,000 acres of accomplishment over two years which exceeds the commitment of 7,200 acres over three years.
 - Nikia is meeting and working with the districts on Fiscal Year 2024 budget needs. Libby Ranger District is focusing on implementation within the OU3 Jackson, Norman McCedar, and Granite Snowshoes 1,000 GNA project areas next year. Rexford Fortine Districts will continue implementing Pinkham Meadow, Edna Fortine, and Sunday project areas. Three Rivers Ranger District will focus on implementation within the Starry Goat, Knotty Pine, and Upper Troy Salvage projects.

Round Robin:

- The DNRC received clearance from the bureau to schedule a date in June to put on home assessment training. The desire is to host a one-day training on a Saturday in June instructed by Ali and Marcel. Lincoln County has a desire to get the home assessments back at the fire departments to qualify for department funding. However, the training being offered does not meet NFPA standards which is a requirement. There are organizations that instruct the NFPA version of home assessments, for which there is funding. **Steve will find a couple of homes to assess for the training.**
- April 29th is Eureka Rendezvous days. Marcel and Ally will have the FAK trailer at this event.
- CWPP will be posted on the Lincoln County Forester, FAK, and DNRC CWPP websites.
- Jennifer acknowledged and commended all the great work the Firesafe Council has completed over the last four years.

Adjourned