

Lincoln County Firesafe Council Meeting Notes

Location – Teams Conference Call

Date- May 19th, 2022

Time-9:00 AM-10:20 AM

Note Taker: Jacob Jeresek

In Attendance: Jacob Jeresek, Ally Talbot, Gary Kedish, Steve Lauer, Cory Farmer, RJ McDole, Dean Whitney, Logan Sandman, Jennifer Nelson, Mark Peck, and Harmony Burow.

*Red font indicates action items.

New/Old Business:

- Online Burn Permit System Update (Jennifer)
 - Within the Libby Outdoor Burning Control Area (LOBCA), 850 permits were issued in the spring of 2022. Of these permits issued, half were issued in March and the other half were issued in April. The cost for the permits issued was \$2,550 and the total cost for individuals utilizing the interactive phone system to activate permits was \$402.90 bringing the total cost of online burn permits in 2022 to \$2952.90. This equates to an average of \$3.47 per permit.
 - Overall, there was positive feedback from the public utilizing the online burn permit system. System analytics showed that people were securing permits at all hours of the day.
 - Since the test trial within the LOBCA went well, the burn permit subcommittee will be looking at adding the rest of Lincoln County to the system for 2023. The subcommittee agreed to look at meeting in October. **Jennifer will reach out to Samantha Mongoven to see how much time NIC needs to update the website to add the rest of the county.**
- Shared Stewardship and MOU (Mark)
 - The Governor was recently here to announce a decade-long agreement to treat up to 10,000 acres per year in Good Neighbor Authority agreements within the WUI. Additionally, the Shared Stewardship Memorandum of Understanding will really come into play with meeting the intent of the agreement. Communication with all parties involved will be vital moving forward.
 - Mark really wants to thank the Firesafe Council for their efforts to push this forward.
- Ripley Update (Jake)
 - In court last week, the Kootenai National Forest asked the judge to allow fuels treatments, excluding commercial harvest, to be allowed to continue. The Forest is expecting to receive a summary judgement in the next week or two. A question was raised on the potential impacts to Libby Surround Stewardship Joint Chief's project and the Kootenai Complex Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill (BIL) project. If the Ripley project is enjoined and no activities are allowed to continue, this would have large effects to Joint Chief's but not as large of an impact to BIL as there is flexibility to accomplish work in the other two firesheds across the forest.

- The Kootenai National Forest also received a notice of intent to sue for the Knotty Pine project on May 17th. This project proposes commercial harvest entirely within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).
- There was a discussion around the need to increase the use of Categorical Exclusions (CE's) within NEPA across the forest. It was reiterated that although there is a time and place for CE's, it doesn't buy much for the Kootenai National Forest to utilize this NEPA authority. This is because with a CE, the Forest needs to show no impact which is difficult with the Endangered Species Act among other things. Additionally, once a proposed action has gone through all resource screens and filters, the final project is typically a very pared down project from original concept. Also, the timeline difference between a CE and Environmental Assessment is only 15 days.
- CWPP Update (Jennifer)
 - The original timeline for the Lincoln County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) was to host public meetings in February and March, have a draft document in May, and have a final approved document in June. Unfortunately, Jennifer has not had time to complete this and the CWPP is currently delayed. Jennifer is looking into contractors to help draft the narrative. Recently, the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) developed a CWPP Guidebook with helpful aides, definitions, and a list of contractors. Jennifer will be picking this effort up again after June 1st. Work left to be completed is to host public meetings and draft a narrative. When the effort picks up again, the core team will reconvene.
 - There was also discussion surrounding the need and importance to have the CWPP completed soon. Currently, the Forest Service Region 1 in cooperation with Montana DNRC is trying to complete a statewide WUI GIS layer to help with potential litigation. Additionally, with local litigation, WUI continues to be an issue raised by litigants.
- Grant Updates (Jennifer, Logan, and Gary)
 - KFRI came in and there's chunks of money for different installments. This money was consolidated into a KFRI grant. The KFRI program was turned over to the county with a portion of this funding expiring on June 1. With this, \$200,000 will expire with no opportunity for an extension. 400 acres are under agreement with 287 acres completed. Approximately \$200,000 has been paid out of the grant, \$70,000 from landowners for a total of \$270,000 paid to 15 contractors and a few do-it-yourself landowners. The average price per acre for treatment is \$942 but this has recently been adjusted for fuel prices and inflation. As a result, the cost per acre treatment will increase. Jennifer has approximately 100 more acres and \$133,000 in agreements to close out by June 1. Jennifer is also receiving calls from developers trying to develop subdivisions and use these grants. These are low priority in the ranking and do not meet the criteria.
 - Western States targets the Farm to Market area and ties in with the Forest Service and NRCS work in that area. Currently working on agreements with 4 landowners.
 - Beetle grant agreement awarded for J Niels Park came through on May 5th with \$22,000. The work identified is on the west side of the park and will begin either next fall or early spring.
 - Applied for a LGA grant through DNRC to get help in the county forester office. Been in contact with commissioners on what the department may look like in the future.
 - The Libby Unit DNRC hired another FTE employee that will be here sometime this fall. Half of position will be the FAK coordinator. The Libby Unit DNRC is also putting in for a wildfire defense grant of which there is \$162 million available nationally. If awarded, they would try to hire a 6 person fuels crew and the other half of the FAK coordinator for 5 years. Marcel would do targeted marketing for private land fuels treatments with landowners and potential options for treatment would include contractors for larger

projects or the fuels crew for smaller projects. With this money, the fuels crew would not be able to work on Forest Service lands but could work on Forest Service lands with GNA monies or through the DNRC Forest Service agreement if modified from prescribed fire support only to include fuels support.

- The Forest Service has submitted all Joint Chief's contracts for fiscal year 2022 which covers 622 acres. Libby Ranger District is currently working to assemble fiscal year 2023 contracts. Also, the forest is trying to build a strategy moving forward with BIL.
- Future Meetings; In person, virtual, blended (All)
 - After a quick discussion about drive time for some attendees and likely not attending if meetings are only in person, it was unanimously agreed to begin hosting a blended monthly Lincoln County Firesafe Council meeting. The next Lincoln County Firesafe Council meeting will be on Thursday June 16th at the Libby Fire Hall with a Microsoft Teams virtual option. **Jennifer will talk to Sol about the technology aspects at the Libby Fire Hall to host a blended meeting.**

Round Robin:

- Gary is developing a news release surrounding shared stewardship and working with some media specialists. Really trying to develop a media strategy moving forward with everything ramping up across the area.
- Cory Farmer was selected into the Kootenai National Forest Fuels Planner position and Nikia Hernandez was selected in the BIL Coordinator position. Both positions have a start date of July 3rd.
- Following the Era of Megafires showing, Steve has received 8-10 requests for address signs.
- Steve is working on management burn permits through the end of May.
- Derek Luchik was hired as the new GNA forester at the Libby Unit DNRC which will leave a void at the NRCS office. He will work out of Libby initially but may be able to work out of Eureka in the future.
- The Montana Forest Action Plan video covering the Rabbit Tracts project is live on the Fire Adapted Kootenai website and Facebook.
- The Libby Unit DNRC received funding for a drone. Marcel is currently working on his pilot's license through the Federal Aviation Administration.
- Logan and Jennifer will be hosting a SAF field trip in the Rabbit Tracts project on May 26th.
- During the recent governor's visit, the Libby Unit DNRC received an Outstanding Service Award.

Adjourned