

Lincoln County Firesafe Council Meeting Notes

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

Date: July 21st, 2022

Time: 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM

Note Taker: Jacob Jeresek

In Attendance: Jacob Jeresek, Steve Lauer, Jennifer Nelson, Marcel Getz, Chris Beeks, Mark Peck, RJ McDole, Doug Turman, Tom Lane, Brian Ressel, Logan Sandman, Gary Kedish, and Dean Whitney.

***Red font indicates action items.**

New/Old Business:

- Community Wildfire Defense Grant (Jacob)
 - A PowerPoint presentation was shared covering an overview of the Community Wildfire Defense Grant. Grants are available to at-risk communities to develop or revise a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) or carry out projects described in a CWPP that is not more than 10 years old. Grants will be offered on a competitive basis and all grant proposals received will undergo a review and ranking process. Grants can request up to \$10 million and require no less than a 25 percent match. The Notice of Funding Opportunity will come out on July 29th and have an application period of approximately 60 days.
 - The purpose of this topic was to see if the Firesafe Council would be interested in learning more about Community Wildfire Defense Grants at an upcoming meeting. It was unanimously decided that the Council would like to add this as an agenda item during the next meeting. **Jacob will reach out to Chris Johnson “CJ” and schedule for the September meeting.**
- Shared Stewardship Update (Mark)
 - With all of the hazardous fuels reduction work and focus in Lincoln County, there is a desire that the Firesafe Council is engaged in what work organizations are completing and provide input and oversight in moving across the county over the next 10 years. Within the Lincoln County Forestry Shared Stewardship MOU, the Firesafe Council is an integral piece and the MOU allows for flexibility in how the Firesafe Council would like to participate.
 - A question was raised as to how this would play into the efforts being completed by the Lincoln County WUI Roadmap team? Mark’s vision is he sees the Lincoln County WUI Roadmap team sunseting soon with the Firesafe Council taking over. This is because we don’t want to have two competing groups and we want a local group to take information to.
 - At the September Firesafe Council meeting, it is desired to have Chad Benson, Greg Poncin, and Brent Teske present agency administrator expectations of what role the Firesafe Council plays, what the MOU involves, and what the shared stewardship initiative entails. This would serve as a pre-meeting to the following bullet. **Jacob will reach out to Chad, Greg, and Brent to schedule. Homework for everyone prior to the September meeting is to review the MOU and shared stewardship initiative to develop a list of questions to ask of agency administrators.**

- There is also a desire to have a meeting after the September Firesafe Council meeting with agency administrators, the Lincoln County WUI Roadmap team, and Firesafe Council to define roles and expectations. This meeting is to be determined.
- Grant Updates (Jennifer and Brian)
 - NRCS is currently focusing on outreach for Fiscal Year (FY) 23 grants within the Joint Chief's, Edna, Fire Adapted Fortine, and Glen Lake Targeted Implementation Plan areas.
 - American Forest Foundation (AFF) has decided to pull out of Montana completely and discontinue funding the DNRC partner position responsible for writing forest management plans on October 1st. Forest management plans are a requirement and currently NRCS does not anyone to write these with Derek Luchik accepting a GNA position with the DNRC. There is currently an agreement between NRCS and DNRC where a request can be made to help write these plans, but this is only a temporary solution.
 - NRCS hired another photographer to capture more pre and post treatment pictures.
 - Kootenai Forests to Rivers Initiative (KFRI) grant expires in April 2023. Similarly, AFF is not funding KFRI grants anymore. The KFRI grant was for \$365,500 and Lincoln County committed to treating 400-450 acres and having 30-40 contracts. The County is sitting good in relation to the terms of the grant with 32 contracts, 366 acres completed, 63 acres in progress, bringing the total acres to 429. KFRI has paid out just over \$260,000 and paid \$90,000 in landowner contributions. With this grant, the average cost per acre to treat is \$1076. From the original grant, there is about \$37,000 remaining and the County is not taking any more applications for KFRI.
 - Western States currently has six landowners participating.
 - Rabbit Tracts Montana Forest Action Plan (MFAP) grant is about 45 percent completed. Stimson has accomplished all of their mastication and precommercial thinning. Northern Lights is currently working on their piece. Jennifer has not heard a status of roadside mastication from the Forest Service. 90 acres of planting was completed near Alvord Lake. Tungsten is on board for completing a shaded fuel break on O'Brien Creek Road to connect a piece between Stimson and DNRC treatments.
 - Jennifer might need help this fall burning piles where 30 acres of Scotch Pine was treated.
 - MFAP request for proposals should be out in late July or early August.
 - Lincoln County and the DNRC are looking into applying for community wildfire defense grants for additional positions. There needs to be a coordinated effort between the two applications in filling positions. The DNRC is looking at adding a fuels crew and NRCS position. Lincoln County would like to add a County position. A question was raised if it is better for both organizations to apply or have either the DNRC or County apply so there isn't a competing grant in Lincoln County. **The DNRC, County, and NRCS will meet with Ashley on August 3rd to see how best to proceed.** To help with the grant application process, it was suggested to develop an estimation of costs beforehand. **Mark will talk with industry on potential funding options to help the NRCS with writing forest management plans.**
- Joint Chief's Update (Brian and Gary)
 - All NRCS FY22 Joint Chief's contracts have been obligated equaling \$610,000. These projects will be beginning soon. NRCS had a meeting with a public relations officer and videographers. Within the Libby Surround Joint Chief's project, lots of pretreatment pictures and drone footage was captured.
 - The Forest Service hand thinning contract was awarded and work within Hoodoo will begin this fall with work in Ripley on hold due to litigation. Additionally, due to litigation, the Ripley mastication contract was pulled and moved to FY23 planning. Currently working on the FY23 budget request.

Round Robin:

- Commissioners signed an emergency declaration for wildfire and forest health conditions in Lincoln County.
- Lincoln County is requesting to be a cooperating agency with the Forest Service for projects. There was a letter of support signed for Black Ram from the Lincoln County Commissioners.
- There are three interested parties in industry in Lincoln County. The MBF plant is still moving forward. A sawmill is starting to gain traction. Recently, a company that converts wood fiber to natural gas has interest in coming here. This is an appealing venture as natural gas is a cheaper energy option compared to electricity or propane and would help both the MBF plant and sawmill pencil out with the need to run kilns. Additionally, with a natural gas option in Libby, this would help provide an alternative heating method and help air quality.
- Marcel met with the homeowner's association at the chain of lakes. This meeting was a success with a lot of people signing up for home assessments. Also, a lot of people are interested in completing fuels reduction on their properties.
- A large landowner on Island Lake, who recently completed fuels reduction on his property, is interested in getting other landowners to complete fuels reduction on their property and reached out to Marcel to help with this.
- Marcel has two cameras now and would like to capture footage of fuels treatments, prescribed fire, and wildfire for the MFAP.
- Marcel recently completed two home assessments in Eureka. One homeowner treated their property and learned how to manage it due to materials on the Fire Adapted Kootenai website.
- Marcel has completed 30 home assessments in the last two months alone. In 2021, he only completed eight and in 2020 only completed two. Residents of Lincoln County are starting to become more proactive.
- Sonya Germann was named the next BLM State Director for Montana/Dakotas.
- There was a news release in the works outlining everything that is occurring in Lincoln County. The author of this press release accepted a new position and it is unclear who this resides with. **Gary will follow up on who's responsibility this is now.**
- All FY22 commitments with the Kootenai Complex Bipartisan Infrastructure Law project are either completed or in contracting awaiting award.
- With the change in program of work due to litigation, Forest Service districts are working on identifying treatment opportunities in new areas to determine which NEPA authority to utilize to hopefully have decisions in FY23.
- Mark is working on developing a county template with checklist to tier questions to HFRA.
- The Firesafe Council agreed to not have an August meeting and reconvene in September.

Adjourned