

Lincoln County Firesafe Council Agenda

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

Date: September 15th, 2022

Time: 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Note Taker: Jacob Jeresek

In Attendance: Jacob Jeresek, Gary Kedish, Greg Poncin, Jennifer Nelson, Marcel Getz, Ali Ulwelling, Brent Teske, Nikia Hernandez, Chris Johnson, RJ McDole, Jeremy Rank, Ali Talbot, Chad Benson, Brian Ressel, and Mark Peck

*Red font indicates action items

New/Old Business:

- Community Wildfire Defense Grant (Chris Johnson “CJ”)
 - Chris first asked the question of how the Firesafe Council is approaching Community Wildfire Defense Grants (CWDG)? Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) is taking the lead on the CWDG application with other organizations and activities falling under the umbrella. Montana DNRC is applying for \$3 million annually for the next five years to hire a fuels crew to complete fuels reduction on private property that is unappealing to contractors or ineligible for other funding mechanisms, treating approximately 1,000 acres of Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks land around the Chain of Lakes that are ineligible for other funding mechanisms, assisting the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) with writing forest management plans (FMP), and ramping up the home assessment program.
 - CJ also reiterated that Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) qualify for CWDG and in Lincoln County's case, could help fund revising the plan. The Council has talked about this previously and due to how far along the revision process is, opted to not apply for CWDG.
 - CJ shared a PowerPoint presentation on CWDG grants which is included with the email of meeting notes. CWDG were authorized under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The notification for funding opportunity for western states with CWDG is very detailed. CWDG applications are submitted through <https://cwdg.forestrygrants.org/>. The deadline to submit applications to the Montana DNRC is October 5th and the deadline for Montana DNRC to submit for consideration is October 7th. Eric Warrington is managing all applications for the State of Montana. All applications received from the western states will be reviewed and ranked by an unbiased panel that doesn't review any application from the state they reside in. In fiscal year 2022, there is \$160 million available to award and in fiscal year 2023 there is \$162 million available. The maximum amount per application is \$10 million. Feedback will be provided to all unsuccessful applicants to improve their application in the future. The application period for 2023 proposals will be next spring.
 - CWDG are designed to help where other programs are not applicable and individual applications can scale from a very large area to an individual Homeowner's Association. Scoring priorities consider an area identified as having high or very high wildfire hazard potential, low-income community, or community impacted by severe disaster. Project proposals must also be described in a CWPP. The three categories that can be funded

include planning projects, outreach, and hazardous fuels reduction. CWDG can be used anywhere except on National Forest System lands and have a quarterly reporting requirement as well as annual performance reports.

- One requirement of CWDG is they are dedicated to at-risk communities. Unfortunately, in Lincoln County, Eureka is not identified as an at-risk community with the metrics CWDG defined. This does not preclude the application from including Eureka but additional documentation for why Eureka should be included needs to be added to the application. For example, the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 identified urban wildland interface communities within the vicinity of federal lands that are at high risk from wildfire which includes Eureka. Additionally, the Montana Forest Action Plan, Montana Wildfire Risk Assessment, CWPP, and the refreshed analysis of the 10 initial landscapes covered under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law identify Eureka as at-risk. **A follow up item is after the meeting, it was discovered that Eureka is labeled as an At-Risk community within the CWDG eligibility requirements and can be included in the CWDG application.**
- Shared Stewardship Agency Administrator Expectations (Chad, Greg, and Brent)
 - This topic is a carryover discussion from the July meeting that Mark raised. The goal is to define the role of the Firesafe Council within the MOU as well as other documents, provide agency administrator/line officer expectations of the Firesafe Council, and determine whether to keep multiple separate working groups outside of the Firesafe Council working on the same efforts or have the Firesafe Council manage these efforts with subcommittees similar to the CWPP revision, subdivision regulations, etc.
 - Montana DNRC perspective is that the Firesafe Council is doing some of the best coordination of anyone in the State of Montana. The expectation is that this effort needs to continue and possibly expand. One example of expansion includes Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) and restoration funding. For example, if there is 17 million board feet under GNA, there is approximately \$1 million available for restoration funding. There may be additional coordination needed on determining which priority to utilize the restoration funding on. **Greg would also like to see Council membership extended to district ranger, unit managers, and agency representatives.**
 - Forest Service perspective is to maintain how aligned we are regarding priority treatment areas in Lincoln County. It's ideal to have a third-party opinion with the Firesafe Council to gather feedback. The goal of the Firesafe Council is to envision what success looks like in 10 years and provide recommendations to meet that goal. **Chad's ask of the Firesafe Council is to leverage some resources to display what the challenges are in the local area such as drone footage of forest conditions and treatment examples, support to help with projects under litigation, and why Categorical Exclusions largely aren't applicable to lands in Lincoln County.** Chad Would like to see a product in the next couple of months. We need to tell the story.
 - Lincoln County perspective is attendance and participation at Firesafe Council meetings is not what it used to be. Recently, there are a lot of moving parts and pieces with subcommittees providing updates as compared to the past with topics that interested most. **Brent would like to see some of the smaller topics incorporated back into the Firesafe Council meetings. Also, with the hybrid approach to monthly meetings, Brent would like the Council to help individuals or organizations that may have technological difficulties gain experience in technologies to hopefully boost monthly attendance.** It was noted that technology improvements are an acceptable funding mechanism within CWDG. Lincoln County is sending a coalition to Washington DC to thank them for recognizing the Kootenai Complex project but also to encourage them to come visit and see exactly what words can't describe. Brent would like to keep moving forward and focus on WUI specific treatments.
 - In an effort to bolster involvement from fire departments, an idea was proposed to provide home assessment training so everyone completing assessments is providing a

consistent, quality product. Fire departments received funding to complete home assessments in the past and may be more apt to participate if there is value added for them. The DNRC is working on a plan to provide training and a standardized method to complete home assessments which is an acceptable funding mechanism within CWDG. There is also a desire to put a stronger sense of responsibility on property owners and the need to treat their own lands. If fire departments are more involved, property owners may be more receptive to their assessments versus hearing it from agencies.

- Greg asked the Council if we had seen a new document developed by leaders from across the State of Montana identifying cross boundary coordination considerations and developing three priority areas for each geographic area. **Greg will forward these considerations to the group.**
- A recommendation was made to have a quarterly meeting with district rangers, unit managers, and agency representatives that takes a deeper dive into the details of priorities of where we're going and why it is a priority. A question was raised as to what needed to be presented to these officials. The answer is the roadmap, CWPP priority areas, Montana Forest Action Plan priorities, etc.
- A recommendation was also made to try moving meetings to evenings and look into having meetings in Eureka and Troy to improve meeting involvement.
- **Decision: Meetings will remain on the third Thursday of the month but will move from daytime meetings to evening meetings. Meetings will move to the Ponderosa Room for in person attendance and be offered through Microsoft Teams for virtual attendance. Every quarter, district rangers, unit managers, and agency representatives will be invited to discuss priorities in Lincoln County. After three months, an evaluation will be made to see if attendance increased. If so, future meetings will stay on this schedule. If not, meetings will revert to daytime meetings. The next Lincoln County Firesafe Council meeting will be on Thursday October 20th from 6:00pm to 9:00pm.**
- **Decision: There was unanimous consent that separate working groups outside of the Firesafe Council should sunset with everything funneling through the Firesafe Council. Subcommittees would be formed to complete tasks asked of the Council. This is an effort to remain consistent and maintain one point of contact.**
- Grant Updates (Jennifer and Brian)
 - Kootenai Forests to Rivers Initiative is in the final installment with roughly \$120,000 remaining although this is mostly allocated. Jennifer anticipates the money will be spent by the time the grant expires next spring.
 - Western states is ramping up with two projects completed in the Swede area.
 - Within the Montana Forest Action Plan Rabbit Tracts project, Northern Lights has completed their portion of the agreement. The Forest Service mastication portion is waiting for contracting to award the mastication task order. This should be awarded this month and work could begin this fall if conditions warrant.
 - Lincoln County is trying to get the bark beetle grant out for J Niels Park. The County would also like to look at ways to get material from a small adjacent section of Forest Service land that displays beetle mortality. Lincoln County will need to work through Nate Gassmann to see what options may exist.
 - NRCS is working on 2023 planning and developing forest management plans. The sign-up deadline for landowners within the three Targeted Implementation Plan (TIP) areas and Joint Chief's is October 28th. The three TIP areas include Fire Adapted Fortine, Edna Creek Forest Resiliency Project, and Glen Lake. 2022 contracts are beginning within the Joint Chief's project area. NRCS is also considering where the next TIP area might be. Some considerations include landowners adjacent to the Pinkham Meadow project, Edna Fortine Fuels Reduction Project, Thompson Chain of Lakes, and the greater Libby area. They are also working on obstacles with staffing to determine what the capacity is to take on new TIP areas.

- Joint Chief's Update (Brian and Gary)
 - NRCS has \$500,000 available in 2023 and is taking new applications focusing on the Parmenter Creek area. They are working on forest management plans for new properties to be completed in 2023. Work has begun on successful 2022 applicants in areas adjacent to the Ripley project.
 - Work on Forest Service land is continuing in the Hoodoo project area. With Ripley under litigation, work is held up. A hand thinning and slashing task order was awarded which includes units from Hoodoo and Ripley. Due to contracting concerns, the mastication task order for Ripley was pulled. This work and funding was requested again in the 2023 budget proposal which brings the total ask in 2023 to \$1.2 million. Gary is waiting on a template from the Washington Office to complete mandatory accomplishment reporting.
- Troy Apple Fest and Forestry Fair (Marcel and Jennifer)
 - Regarding Apple Fest, Marcel is unable to attend with other commitments. Looking to see if Matt Chumbley could take the Fire Adapted Kootenai (FAK) trailer to Apple Fest. **Jennifer will coordinate with Matt to see if this is an option.**
 - Dave Marsh is taking the FAK trailer to Forestry Fair. There will be lots of information for all ages at the forestry fair. Looking at trying to secure some raffle items for people.
- Fall Burns (Jennifer)
 - Dave Brummer from Stimson contacted Jennifer about the desire to burn piles adjacent to OU3 this fall. Coordination has begun with Dustin Webb on timing as these may come into prescription in late November or early December.
 - There is also 30 acres of scotch pine on the Mackey property the County is looking to complete around the same time. The County has requested assistance from Lincoln County Rural Fire Department and the DNRC. Dustin is aware of the request and Jennifer is looking at coordinating with him on Monday.
 - The prescribed fire pause was lifted for the Forest Service. There are several required action items the Forest Service is working through this month with their burn plans. Due to conditions, the Forest Service is looking at pile burning only this fall. A question was raised as to what burns are planned within the airshed this fall. **Cory Farmer will determine this and coordinate with Jennifer.**
 - A question was raised on the status of piles at Ski Dale. The plan was to air curtain burn these this fall through a contract. However, contracting is unable to finalize the request this fiscal year, so the contract was pulled. Libby District is currently looking into other options to complete this. A suggestion was made to look into GNA.
 - Mark mentioned that with the Countywide Emergency Declaration for Forest Health and Wildland Fire Threat, there may be more flexibility for burning within the airshed. **Mark will research this further and report back to the Council.**
 - Marcel is looking for opportunities to use his drone to document work on the ground for educational opportunities. **If people have fuels reduction activities they're completing, reach out to Marcel to see if your project is an opportunity.**

Round Robin:

- No topics covered in the round robin due to meeting length.

Adjourned