

Lincoln County Firesafe Council Meeting Notes

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

Date: October 19th, 2023

Time: 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Note Taker: Jacob Jeresek

In Attendance: Jacob Jeresek, Jeremy Rank, Jennifer Nelson, Jesse Haag, Doug Turman, Logan Sandman, Marcel Getz, Steve Lauer, Brent Teske, Dean Whitney, Seth Carbonari, Nate Gassmann, Brian Ressel, Tyson Piper, Kevin Peck, and Cole Jenson

***Red font indicates action items.**

New/Old Business:

- Quarterly Lincoln County Project Updates to Agency Representatives (All)
 - Kootenai National Forest (KNF):
 - The Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) War Horse timber sale sold consisting of 240 acres of treatment.
 - There is over 2,300 acres of pile burning beginning next week through November across the forest. Most of this is on the Rexford Fortine Ranger District.
 - The KNF Forest Plan Amendment considering Bears Outside Recovery Zone (BORZ) began the 45-day objection period on September 23, 2023. The public comment period has completed.
 - The Rexford Fortine Ranger District is working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on consultation for the East Fork fire deck sale. As soon as consultation recommendations comes back, the East Fork fire deck sale will be advertised. The district is hopeful it will be advertised in the next 2-3 weeks which consists of approximately 140 log truck loads. The district is also working on the East Fork Fire Salvage planning document this fall and winter.
 - Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC):
 - The Libby Unit will begin pile burning on Monday beginning with the Rabbit Tracts project near Troy. The Libby Unit has burning planned this year in eight timber sales of which two are within the Libby Outdoor Burning Control Area (LOBCA). Additionally, the Libby Unit will be burning all piles for Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP) in the Chain of Lakes area.
 - The Cripple Horse timber sale sold recently and should be completed this fall. The Lightning Peak and McKillop timber sales are currently active. The DNRC is currently looking at a future sale in the Canyon Creek area.
 - FWP issued a scoping notice for a fuels reduction project at Island Lake.
 - Jerry Akin received the Tree Farmer of the year award.
 - Stimson:
 - Currently three active sales in the Tepee, Brush Pecolet, and McKillop areas.
 - Will begin burning piles next week pending air quality approval.
 - Will be meeting with FWP on conservation easements with their lands.
 - FWP is installing information kiosks in the Pipe Creek and Fisher areas.
 - Lincoln County:
 - Stever received a phone call and email from the Libby Mayor regarding concerns with the future water supply and surrounding the current drought situation.

Currently, the Libby Fire Department is using water tenders on all responses and identifying alternative water sources.

- Subdivision Regulations Revision and Firesafe Input (Jennifer and Jesse)
 - The Lincoln County Planning Department will be completing a subdivision regulation update due to new laws added during the last legislative session and the current growth rate within Lincoln County. Additionally, most of the ideal subdivision locations have already been developed resulting in new subdivision requests being in steep, forested, and fire prone areas. Green Diamond has identified 5,500 acres in the Happy's Inn area that they will be selling for subdividing as an example. The goal of the update is to meet the new laws and create efficiencies. Jesse applied for a grant to hire a consultant to meet with stakeholders to gather information to input within the subdivision regulations. This task will begin sometime early 2024.
 - Within the subdivision regulations, there are mitigations for structure and wildland fire. Through experience, the Planning Department has learned that mitigations need to be completed by developers prior to the subdivision approval otherwise these mitigations are rarely completed. The developers are required to reach out to the fire service area to see what mitigations they would need to complete fire suppression in the area. Additionally, Lincoln County has four fire risk evaluators that look at fuels and wildland fire risks within the subdivision proposal and develop mitigation plans.
 - Kevin presented on the current issue with insurance carriers not insuring homeowners in areas of fire risk. The insurance industry uses a fire map that is primarily based on the property location in relation to the proximity to public land. Other data used in the fire map includes moisture content, historic data, population density, and what work has or has not been completed by public land agencies. These fire maps are not updated in a timely manner so if a public land agency completes fuels reduction work near properties, homeowners are not likely to see insurance benefits soon. Due to severe losses in other states recently, insurance carriers are pushing to get wildfire designated as a general condition like hurricanes. States that have hurricanes have state pools for homeowners to apply for insurance. Within Montana, there is no state pool yet for wildfire and no anticipation of one soon. Currently, a lot of insurance carriers are grandfathering in policy holders. However, when the property switches owners, the new owners are either unable to secure insurance or the monthly insurance rate is excessive. For example, Kevin provided an example in the area where a homeowner is paying \$11,000 a month for homeowners insurance to be protected against wildfire loss. In this example, the insurance covered a total valued property of \$16,000,000 which included a 10,000 square foot log home, a second log home, and four outbuildings including a 6,000 square foot shop. The extreme insurance cost in this example is a combination of the assets and location. Also, four other high value insurance carriers declined to quote due to risk.
 - During the 2020 subdivision regulation revision, the Firesafe Council participated and provided feedback. **During this meeting, the Firesafe Council voted unanimously to stand up a subdivision regulation update subcommittee for the 2024 revision.**
- Grant Updates and Planned Grant Applications (NRCS, Lincoln County, DNRC)
 - DNRC Libby Unit started accepting applications for the Community Wildfire Defense Grant (CWDG) mitigation program. To date, Marcel has received 10 applications with another 30 interested parties. If all parties are awarded, there will be over 100 acres of treatments accepted in the first year which is exceeding the targets established in the CWDG application. The selection criteria for this program includes not being in an area that interferes with other grant opportunities offered in the area and within or adjacent to a priority treatment area identified in the Lincoln County Community Wildfire Protection

Plan (CWPP). The DNRC fuels crew was hired but will not start until next March. Also, the Libby Unit hired Vicki Stephens to handle the landowner reimbursement side of the CWDG. Vicki is currently assisting Jennifer implement grant applications for the Western States grant. For landowner properties, Marcel is administering properties five acres or less and Vicki is administering properties over five acres.

- Western States is focusing on the original target area south of Libby in the airport, Farm to Market, and Swede Mountain areas as well as around the Trojan Defense project area.
- Lincoln County Tidbits of the CWDG is waiting for paperwork from the State of Montana.
- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has two active Targeted Implementation Plan (TIP) areas consisting of Fire Adapted Fortine and Glen Lake. October 27, 2023 is the deadline to apply for fuels reduction grants. Currently there is a lot of interest especially from large landowners. NRCS is working on burning piles and implementing smaller projects this fall. Next spring, NRCS will hold a Local Working Group meeting to prioritize the next application for a TIP project area.
- Joint Chief's Update (Brian)
 - This is the last year to sign up for Joint Chief's. The deadline to apply is October 27, 2023. NRCS may apply for an extension or additional funding due to heightened interest. Currently, NRCS is starting to plan 2024 projects with properties spread out over the Libby Surround Joint Chief's project area. So far 14 people have signed up with most of these consisting of larger landowners.
- Kootenai Complex Update (Jacob)
 - The KNF has submitted \$800,000 in contracts for Fiscal Year 2024 with many more in the works. Nikia will provide a more thorough update during next month's meeting as Fiscal Year 2023 accomplishment reporting is due at the end of the month.
- Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition Presentation (Cole)
 - The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (RVCC) is a small non-profit organization spread out across the west. Their goals are to promote solutions that align private and public land stewardship with rural community benefit. RVCC's work includes peer learning events, learning products, and policy analysis. Over the next year, RVCC will be facilitating Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) peer-learning sessions to hear common themes across the other WCS landscapes. The goals are to create awareness and connection-building, share innovations experiences and challenges, and capture common themes. Themes after talking to other priority landscapes to date is prioritization, funding strategies, and partner coordination and collaboration. For the Kootenai Complex WCS landscape, RVCC is looking at sessions beginning in January through March for a couple times a month.

Round Robin:

- The Lincoln County CWPP core team met with Forest Service Regional personnel on the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) delineation in Lincoln County due to recent court rulings. The take home message is Lincoln County does not need to revise the CWPP as this is a federal agency issue. The Region is undertaking a mapping effort to identify the Part B WUI definition of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) to help make projects more defensible when utilizing HFRA National Environmental Policy Act authorities and treating in Canada lynx habitat.
- Burning in the LOBCA has gone well so far. However, when completing management burn permits, issuers need to take a harder look of what is required on site the day of the burn as well as notifications.

Adjourned