

Lincoln County Firesafe Council Meeting Notes

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

Date: December 15th, 2022

Time: 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Note Taker: Jacob Jeresek

In Attendance: Jacob Jeresek, Jennifer Nelson, Steve Lauer, Nikia Hernandez, Cory Farmer, Nick Youngstrom, Jodi Turk, Matt Chumbley, Gary Kedish, Dean Whitney, Tom Lane, Marcel Getz, Doug Turman, and Mark Peck

*Red font indicates action items

New/Old Business:

- Quarterly Lincoln County Project Presentation to Agency Representatives (All)
 - Due to underrepresentation of agency representatives and line officers at the meeting, a decision was made to forgo this discussion and move the quarterly meeting to the January 19th meeting.
- Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) Kootenai Complex Presentation (Nikia)
 - Nikia provided an overview of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, 10-year strategy to confront the wildfire crisis, and the awarded Kootenai Complex Bipartisan Infrastructure Law project. The PowerPoint Nikia used during the presentation is also included.
- LCFSC Upcoming Chair, Co-Chair and Possible Vote (Jacob)
 - During the last meeting, a motion was made to solicit the Lincoln County Rural Fire Departments to see if any individual had an interest in serving as the Lincoln County Firesafe Council Chair. Tom reached out to the departments but did not receive any interest.
 - A motion was made and approved for 2023 to have Jacob Jeresek continue as the Chair, Jennifer Nelson continue as the vice-chair, and for **Lincoln County to find any County individual to serve as the chair beginning in 2024. With this, the Lincoln County Firesafe Council Bylaws will need to be updated to reflect this change.**
- Lincoln County Fire Districts Map (Jennifer)
 - The Lincoln County Fire Districts map was sent out to the fire departments for comment with little or no feedback provided. Jennifer would like to include the map in the revised Community Wildfire Protection Plan. It was assumed that because there was little or no feedback provided, the map was correct. A motion was made and approved to use the Lincoln County Fire Districts map in its current state as presented.
- New Agency Projects (Forest Service, DNRC, NRCS, Lincoln County, Timber Companies)
 - Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) Updates: Montana Governor Greg Gianforte has approximately 20 million dollars to use across the state with most of it used primarily for GNA. The timeline to spend this money is 2 years. Locally, the DNRC is trying to add another position in Libby. Also, the 80 acre Pinkham Meadow thinning and machine piling contract was awarded. The DNRC is also working with the Forest Service on the Snowshoe/Granite project. This project would be a DNRC project through GNA and the DNRC would take the project from developing the proposal through NEPA and implementation. Paul Klug is tasked with the team lead. There are 3 other projects across the state working on contracting with the Shipley Group to train on how to complete NEPA.

- Grant Updates and Planned Grant Applications (Jennifer and Brian)
 - Kootenai Forests to Rivers Initiative is in the final months before expiration. After this, Lincoln County is moving to the Western States grant in the Airport, Farm to Market, and Swede Mountain areas. Western States expires in 2024 and Jennifer will be requesting an extension. To date, there has been little interest in this grant opportunity due to the 75/25 cost share and other opportunities that provide a better deal for landowners.
 - Awardees of the Community Wildfire Disaster Grants (CWDG) should be announced in January. The next round for CWDG applications is due in March 2023.
- Joint Chief's Update (Brian and Gary)
 - For the Forest Service portion, during the fiscal year funding request period, Libby Ranger District submitted a request for \$820,000 in 2023. This is more than the grant application specified but was to recover the mastication money that was pulled in 2022 due to litigation within the Ripley Project. Currently, the Forest Service only received \$95,000 of this request and is waiting on \$72,000 of State and Private Forestry funding. These funds are tied to the continuing resolution and will need to wait to see what Congress approves. Gary is working with the Region on this funding request. Joint Chief's funding expires at the end of the third year. However, a request for an extension can be made and this project is a good candidate due to the Ripley Project litigation preventing work from being completed.
 - NRCS has enough applicants to meet their 2023 commitment.

Round Robin:

- The mastication of the DNRC section on Bobtail is completed.
- South Korea and Japan are transitioning from wood to Biomass. As such, investors have visited the Port Authority site to determine viability for an operation in Libby. This has gained a lot of interest and traction. The plan is part of a 4-phase approach with the investors leasing and eventually purchasing the property. With this property, the cleanup of the property is known by the investors and they want to complete it. A purchase price will be determined prior to cleanup and all funds used to complete the cleanup, will be taken off the top of the final purchase price. The goal is to install a chip line, pellet mill, and cant line. The products provided with this operation are not dependent on the United States market as they will be shipped overseas. The company will take any amount of non-saw and hog fuel that can be provided within an 80-mile radius of Libby. The company plans to start buying wood this spring. This new business will employ about 30 individuals.
- There was recently a state cross-boundary coordinating meeting where many counties in Montana were not represented. Because of the underrepresentation, an idea was proposed to create a Cross-boundary coordinating group that mirrors the Northern Rockies Coordinating Group board. This board would prioritize where grants are awarded across the State of Montana. This concept is still in the development stages and more information will come in the future.

Adjourned