



RAVALLI COUNTY LOCAL WORKING GROUP

(RCLWG)

Thursday, January 23, 2020,

Minutes

1709 North First Street

Hamilton, Montana 59840

(406) 361-6181



Ravalli County Local Working Group (RCLWG) meeting on Thursday, January 23, 2020, was called to order at 1:30 p.m. in the US Forest Service Building, Hamilton, by Kent Myers, Bitterroot Conservation District Supervisor.

Introductions and Attendance:

Kori Anderson, Bitter Root Land Trust, BRLT; Mike Ball, Landowner; Allen Bjergo, Bitter Root Resource Conservation and Development, RC&D; Christine Brissette, Trout Unlimited; Pam Gouse, Resource Conservation & Development, RC&D; Patrick Mangan, Ravalli County Extension; Kent Myers, Bitterroot Conservation District, BCD; Al Pernichele, Bitterroot River Water Commissioner; Andrea Price, Bitter Root Water Forum, BRWF; Julie Ralston, BCD Admin; Stacy Welling, District Conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service, NRCS.

Minutes

Gouse moved to approve the RLWG minutes of 10/10/19 as proposed. Pernichele seconded, motion carried.

Review actions from last meeting:

1. Myers submitted the RCLWG letter of support for the Bitter Root Land Trust's proposed RCPP grant application.
2. Ralston and Welling organize a public outreach meeting in support of the RCLWG's Forest Health Targeted Implementation Plan (TIP). The meeting was held on Wednesday the 11th of December 6:30p.m.-8:30p.m., at the Corvallis Fire Hall. There were approximately 13 landowners from the targeted area in attendance. However, there has been more interest shown by other landowners who received the flyer that was mailed out.

Partner Updates:

NRCS:

Welling Reported,

- The proposed RCLWG Sapphire Front Forest Health TIP project has been submitted to the NRCS Area Office and will then be forwarded to the NRCS State Office for final review. Based upon the initial review she was asked to reduce the project area as per requested modifications. Welling should know by the middle of February if the TIP proposal is approved. Funding for the approved TIP will be allocated over a four-year period. Landowners within the approved identified project area will be able to apply annually, but must go through the qualification and ranking process. There was some concern that a number of landowners within the reduced project area may be ineligible based on annual income of \$900K or greater.
- The Ravalli County NRCS Field Office Long Range Plan has been submitted. After it is reviewed for approval by the State NRCS Office, Welling will make it available for local review.

BRLT:

- BRLT's RCPP grant application has been submitted. The application process is very competitive going against the nation and not just state applicants. Montana had six applications submitted. The BRLT application is for a conservation easement program that if approved would offer landowners with smaller parcels of land the ability to keep those smaller parcels in open land and/or agricultural production. The

amount of funds requested for the Ravalli County RCCP is 3.8 million. BRLT is hoping to hear on the status of its application by the middle of March.

BRWF:

Price Reported,

- The BRWF is currently working with landowners to develop riparian restoration projects in the Three Mile and Burnt Fork Creek watersheds. It has applied for the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) 319 grant funds to assist with this project. There was some discussion on partnering to develop a water quality/quantity TIP for this area.

BCD:

Myers Reported,

- He is currently in the process of updating the BCD's Long Range Plan. He will review the NRCS Ravalli County Long Range Plan for additional information.
- In an effort to address one of the BCD's identified water quantity/quality resource concerns. Myers and Pernichele have drafted a Renewable Resource Planning grant application. Funding from the grant would be used to prepare a technical narrative for the improvement of surface water management and efficient use of irrigation water diverted into canals from the mainstem and West Fork of the Bitterroot River between Painted Rocks Reservoir and Bell Crossing. The BCD Board will review the grant application at its next meeting on the 28th of January. The planning grant application first phase is due on the 31st of January. The implementation grant application second phase is due at the end of May. There was a brief discussion on whether or not the BCD would have to apply for the implementation grant if there wasn't enough support after the planning grant was completed. Also discussed was the possibility of NRCS assisting with the implementation portion of the project.

TU:

Brissette Reported,

- TU partnered with the USFS and water users to install two fish screens. One on the upper East Fork of the Bitterroot River and the other on the West Fork of the Bitterroot River.
- The upper headwaters of Burnt Fork Creek has been identified as the Bitterroot Valley's premier bull trout area. TU has partnered with the BCD to conduct a feasibility study for re-connecting Burnt Fork Creek to the Bitterroot River while maintaining irrigation flow and delivery of Supply Ditch water to its users. The cost of installing a siphon or a flume at the site where Burnt Fork Creek and the Supply Ditch intersect is costly. The flume may be the preferred choice for the irrigators at an estimated cost of \$350,000.00 plus. There are several concerns that may need to be addressed prior to implementation of this project. One of those concerns is protection of the native fish from non-native fish if connectivity is restored.
- TU is currently working with the Lee Metcalf refuge to remove fish barriers between the Bitterroot River and Burnt Fork Creek. It is also in the process of prioritizing resource concerns for future fisheries protection and development.

MSU Extension:

Mangan Reported,

- The Ravalli County Extension Office has a lot going on with educational workshops scheduled between March 11-May 6th workshops will address: Herbicide Modes of Action; Rodent Control Strategies; The Good, The Bad, The Ugly Weeds to Watch Out for; Spray Equipment Calibration Field Day; Controlling Codling Moth in Apple Orchards; Farm Business Management Classes.
- Mangan is working with the Ravalli County Weed Department on ways to educate and manage invasive noxious weed in Ravalli County. One of the up and coming invasive species of concern is Ventenata.
- Ravalli County Extension is in the process of hiring a new full time Extension Agent to lead its 4-H program. This person must have a bachelor degree and within six years of hiring obtain a master degree. They must be versed in conflict resolution and have experience working with youth and adults.

RC&D:

Gouse Reported,

- The Bitter Root RC&D oversees three counties Mineral, Missoula, and Ravalli. It has leveraged enough funding to operate through fiscal year 2020.
- RC&D did receive Hazard Fuels Reduction funding. However, most all these funds went to Mineral County. The Ravalli County funding has been allocated.
- Gouse sits on the National Conservation Planning Partnership (NCP) Review Board and will be attending the national meeting at Las Vegas in the middle of February.

Bjergo Reported,

- It is impressive to know that through partnerships over one hundred million acres have been reserved for conservation easements throughout the US. The Ravalli County's Open-Land easement program is halfway through its bond program and nearly six thousand six hundred plus acres have been preserved through this program.

Identify resource concern(s) for potential Targeted Implementation Plans (TIPs) to be included in the June 2020 update to the NRCS Long Range Plan

- Welling reported, June 1st is the deadline for submitting a 2021 TIP proposal. Welling will have little time to develop this TIP if the 2020 TIP is approved as she will be in the process of developing and contracting with landowners. On the ground projects for year one of the 2020 TIP is imperative.
- Discussed TIP ideas for 2021: 1) RCPP priority area Corvallis to Burnt Fork Creek developing connectivity between large conservation easement land parcels and smaller land parcels. Discussed the resource concerns within this identified area: riparian restoration; soil health concerns; weed management; water quality and quantity issues. 2) Burnt Fork watershed area for restoring connectivity with the Bitterroot River, riparian restoration, soil health, water quality/quantity, weed management. 3) Bitterroot River irrigation management for soil health, fish habitat, water quality/quantity. 4) Bitterroot front forest health restoration, soil health, water quality, weed management, wildlife habitat improvement.

Other Topics:

- Discussed having an agency purchase a small no-till drill that could be used by landowners who are proposing pollinator plot projects and/or soil health improvement projects.

Actions

Welling will meet individually with BRWF, BRLT, and TU to discuss potential 2021 TIP proposal(s).

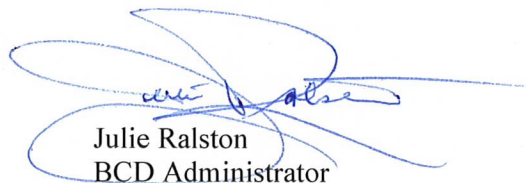
Next meeting

Meet in the middle of April (date to be announced), 1:30p.m.-3:30p.m., US Forest Service Building, Hamilton.

Meeting adjourned at 3:20 p.m.



Kent Myers
Chairman



Julie Ralston
BCD Administrator

Date: 08/12/2020