



RAVALLI COUNTY LOCAL WORKING GROUP

(RCLWG)

Wednesday, February 28, 2019

Minutes

1709 North First Street

Hamilton, Montana 59840

(406) 361-6181



Ravalli County Local Working Group (RCLWG) meeting Wednesday, February 28, 2019, called to order at 1:30 p.m., by Kent Myers.

Introductions and Attendance:

Kyle Anderson (Bitter Root Land Trust, BRLT), Heather Barber (Bitter Root Water Forum, BRWF), Byron Bonney (RC&D Forester), Pam Gouse (RC&D), Patrick Mangan (Ravalli County Extension), Kent Myers (Bitterroot Conservation District, BCD), Stacy Welling (Natural Resources Conservation Service, NRCS), Julie Ralston (BCD), Matt Whithed (NRCS).

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Montana Focused Conservation and Targeted Implementation Plan:

- Matt Whithed reported: NRCS has a new State Conservationist Tom Watson. Watson is in the process of implementing "Montana Focused Conservation", an enhanced approach to delivering Farm Bill programs. NRCS Field Offices are charged in working with producers and partners to provide a vision of collaborative effective land stewardship, baseline resource conditions, detailed past conservation efforts, desired future outcomes; and outline a prioritized list of resource concerns and solutions from which Targeted Implementation Plans (TIP) can be generated and submitted for funding consideration. TIPs must fall within identified geographical areas. Every TIP submitted for fiscal year 2020 funding must be attached to a NRCS Long Range Plan (LRP) and submitted to the State Office by December 31, 2019. All Montana NRCS Offices must submit an LRP by December 31, 2020. Stacy Welling, NRCS Hamilton Field Office Soil Conservationist, will be working on the Ravalli County LRP. Discussed samples of TIPs. The RCLWG discussed how it could be of assistance in developing the NRCS Ravalli County LRP. RCLWG listed its identified top resource concerns in Ravalli County: 1) Forest Health; 2) Pasture/Range; 3) Water Quality; 4) Water Quantity; 5) Noxious Weeds.
- Myers reported, the BCD is updating its outdated long range plan in close relation to NRCS's plan. Both agencies will be reaching out to partners for input.

Partnership Reports:

- Heather Barber, BRWF, gave a brief update on the watershed restoration projects. The BRWF is also working on: 1) Building a list of restoration projects in the Burnt Fork area. 2) Partnering with Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP) to enhance the Stevensville Fishing Access site. 3) Partnering with FWP and the Department of Natural Resources Conservation (DNRC) for restoration projects in the Three Mile Wildlife Management Area. 4) Updating the BRWF's Watershed Restoration Plan for the purpose of leveraging more funding and getting more restoration projects on the ground.

The BRWF hopes to continue identifying and partnering with others to leverage other resource funds that may be available such as the Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) 319 program. This program works to combat nonpoint source pollution, sediment load, temperature, and nutrients. The DEQ has chosen the Bitterroot as its priority pilot project area because of partnerships and projects that are already in motion. Approximately 50% of the million dollars issued for the 319 program will be offered to the Bitterroot. Matching dollars are required at 60-40. The application deadline date for project planning is March 15th and for actual project implementation is November 2019.

- Byron Bonny RC&D Forester reported, the RC&D is working with private landowners on fuel mitigation projects in Missoula County, Mineral County, and Ravalli County. RC&D currently has 5 grants with two of the grants specifically for projects in Ravalli County. RC&D has applied for two more grants from FEMA for fuel mitigation on approximately 200 acres. One for Ravalli and one for Mineral in the amount of \$270,000.00 each. There are other grant opportunities through individual organizations called Cohesive Strategy Grants that help landowners define and implement defensible space and fuel reduction. The grant application process is difficult and competitive with no guarantees.
- Pam Gouse, RC&D reported, Byron Bonney has written all of his own grants and has received a national award for obtaining and implementing forest mitigation projects on over 6000.00 acres of private land. Other programs RC&D is currently working on: address Ravalli County homelessness, healthy kids, community and economic development.
- Kyle Anderson BLT, is working with landowners, NRCS, and the Ravalli County Open Lands Program to develop conservation easement throughout the county. It is also working with the Ravalli County Weed District through a \$25000.00 grant to address weed management on the conservation easements. Whithed asked if BLT had a monitoring program in place for the weed management. Anderson stated they are monitoring through photos.
- Patrick Mangan, Ravalli County Extension reported, extension is focusing on educational outreach helping producers develop farm business plans, forest stewardship workshops, and other educational outreach programs. He would like to partner with others to hold educational workshops on noxious invasive species and possible total maximum daily load (TMDL) concerns throughout the county.
- Myers reported the BCD has a cost-share program for private landowners wanting to implement best management practice on their property such as riparian fencing, water gaps, repair of leaking ditches, weed management, stream restoration, wildlife habitat enhancement, soil health improvement and much more. The BCD annually sets aside \$20,000.00 with the maximum amount awarded to individual projects set at \$7000.00. He is hoping some of these projects might help NRCS identify areas of resource concern and the development of its LRP for targeted implementation.
- Christine Brissette, Special Projects Manager for Missoula TU, could not attend the meeting but provided information on the projects that TU is pursuing currently in Ravalli County. The first project is called the Lower Burnt Fork Creek Reconnect Project, with the goal of improving the water quality in lower Burnt Fork Creek and reconnecting the creek to the Bitterroot River. This will be accomplished in two phases, the first of which is to eliminate the intersection of the Supply Ditch and Burnt Fork Creek using either a siphon or flume. This will prevent the warmer and more nutrient-rich water from the Supply Ditch from mingling with lower Burnt Fork Creek and will also eliminate a major barrier to fish passage. TU has partnered with the Supply Ditch Association and BCD to seek funding to evaluate alternative infrastructure to separate these flows.

The second phase is to return Burnt Fork Creek to its natural channel as it travels through the Lee Metcalf wildlife refuge, allowing it to once again flow freely into the Bitterroot River. The second TU project is to improve fish passage in high priority bull trout stream reaches by upgrading the two highest priority diversions identified in a study conducted by TU in 2017. TU has developed fish screen designs for the two diversions and is currently raising funds to implement the improved diversions in 2019 and 2020.

Prioritized Top Resource Concerns:

- Myers asked if the RCLWG's five identified concerns: 1) Forest Health; 2) Pasture/Range; 3) Water Quality; 4) Water Quantity; 5) Noxious Weeds could be placed within NRCS's RLP? Whithed believed the concerns were not specific enough. He will supply the group with NRCS's outlined LRP requirements.
- Byron Bonney, RC&D, will give NRCS information on the geographical areas of forest management projects it has been working on.
- Patrick Mangan, Ravalli County Extension, and Stacy Welling, NRCS, will identify areas of concern on pasture/range management.
- Heather Barber, BRWF, will identify areas of concern for water quality.
- Kent Myers, BCD, will identify areas of water quantity.
- Stacy Welling, NRCS, will work with the Ravalli County Weed Board to see if it has any areas of identified concern.

RCLWG agreed to:

- 1) Identify top potential geographic areas of focus.
- 2) Identify responsibility for action and create a timeline for action.
- 3) Meet in four to six weeks and bring back input with reasonable outcomes that can be monitored and identified as acceptable TIP projects.

Myers asked the group to review RCLWG's compiled list of funding resources and e-mail him any updates.

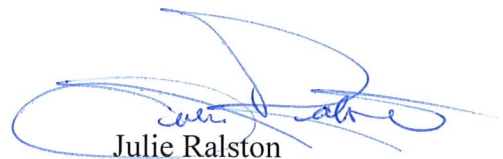
Meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Kent Myers
Chairman



Date:

4/17/19



Julie Ralston

BCD Administrator