



RAVALLI COUNTY LOCAL WORKING GROUP

(RCLWG)

Wednesday, June 5, 2019

Minutes

1709 North First Street

Hamilton, Montana 59840

(406) 361-6181



Ravalli County Local Working Group (RCLWG) meeting Wednesday, June 5, 2019, was called to order at 2:00 p.m. by Chairman Kent Myers and introductions were made.

Introductions and Attendance:

Heather Barber (Bitter Root Water Forum, BRWF), Kyle Barber (Bitter Root Land Trust, BRLT), Allen Bjergo (Bitter Root Resource Conservation and Development, RC&D), Christine Brissette (Trout Unlimited, TU), Pam Gouse (RC&D), Patrick Mangan (Ravalli County Extension), Kent Myers (Bitterroot Conservation District, BCD), Sharon Schroeder (Landowner), Stacy Welling (Natural Resources Conservation Service, NRCS), Sam Lawry (Teller Wildlife Refuge), Al Pernichele (Water Commissioner), J.R. Iman (Painted Rocks Water).

Minutes

Heather Barber moved to approve the 04/17/2019 minutes. Welling seconded, motion carried.

History of the Ravalli County Local Working Group

Kent Myers gave a brief history of the group's activities. In past years, the RCLWG was largely used to help establish local priorities to help guide and score NRCS's EQIP program. More recently, the group has identified the resource concerns in Ravalli County that should be included in the new long range plan that is being written by the NRCS. These concerns will also be addressed in an update to the BCD's long range plan. Although the BCD's plan was written in 1980, many of the resource concerns have remained similar over the years. Current concerns are: Forest Health, Pasture/Range, Water Quality, Water Quantity, and Noxious Weeds. The long range plans for NRCS and BCD will exist side by side, and BCD's plan can help NRCS's standing.

Update on NRCS's Long Range Plan and Targeted Implementation Plans (TIPs)

Stacy Welling, NRCS, stated she is getting assistance on the NRCS long range plan from Lorraine Vogt's staff, who will work on the baseline while Welling will work on the resource trends. The deadline for the NRCS Ravalli County plan is December 31, 2019. The plan will assist NRCS in identifying specific areas of resource concern and solutions from which TIPs can be generated and submitted for funding consideration. Welling proposed that the initial TIP will be focused on forest health. NRCS will work with Bitter Root RC&D on this resource concern. The plan will include pre-commercial thinning for forest health, structure protection, salvage cuts for diseased stands, and shrub planting (for disease problems). Lands treated do not have to be contiguous, and several large holdings have been identified as potential landowners with whom NRCS could work. When questioned about additional mitigation practices that could be included, such as roads, Welling replied that evidently applications with more than three practices are not viewed favorably.

While water quality and quantity are both identified as resource concerns, forest health would be easier to create a quantifiable plan at this time. Barber suggested that, if riparian fencing and irrigation are needed but can't be worked on at this time, perhaps the RCPP (see below) could create its own TIP to address this need. Iman suggested that water measurement equipment such as flow meters would be a need up and down the valley. Water resource management, riparian repair and climate change resiliency are other concerns that ought to be in the pipeline. Some of these concerns could be the basis for future TIPs.

Welling reported that there used to be separate initiatives with separate money sources from a nationwide pool of funds. The approval process for a TIP begins locally as projects and potential landowners are identified, then

Ravalli County Local Working Group Minutes June 5, 2019

the Field Office reviews for questions and refinement, and the DC decides what they want to take on. Actual sign-up of identified landowners does not take place until the TIP has been approved.

The RCLWG endorsed the proposal to have forest health be the subject of the first TIP.

Outreach is an important element of developing a TIP. The RCLWG agreed that the group could do outreach – letters, opinion articles, etc. Myers will follow up with the Conservation District to see if they would support the idea of the RCLWG leading the effort on outreach.

Local Working Group Input on Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Kyle Barber provided a handout on a proposed RCPP for Ravalli County. The purpose of this RCPP is “to permanently conserve, enhance, restore the agricultural resources, diversified agricultural economy (and possibly other identified RCLWG priorities) in the Bitterroot Valley’s most productive agricultural corridor by further conserving, managing, enhancing, restoring and promoting the sustainable use of agricultural and water resources in the Burnt Fork, Eastside Highway and Corvallis corridors.” The lead partner will be the Bitter Root Land Trust (as the applicant, grant agreement recipient, reporting). The partnership body would be the RCLWG (for strategic vision, landowner outreach, progress review and advice). There are many potential partners, such as Extension, Bitter Root Water Forum, Conservation District, Right to Farm and Ranch Board, Open Lands Board, Ravalli County Commissioners, other nonprofits, private landowners, and businesses). RCPP does not require landowners to be identified at application creation. RCLWG could do the outreach to identify landowners.

The Group was supportive of the concept, but they also realize that the implementation of whatever the Farm Bill contains is uncertain.

Update on BCD long range plan; status and potential goals and resource concerns to be included

Kent Myers provided a handout and reported that the proposed long-range goals and objectives would be reviewed by the Conservation District. The overall goal: “Conserve and enhance the soil and water resources in Ravalli County through education and outreach, partnering with other agencies and nonprofits, and providing administrative, technical, and financial support.” The Group reviewed the specific goals and objectives and made recommendations for changes. Myers explained that BCD would not necessarily be doing hands-on projects but will provide admin support, technical assistance and financing. Once the Conservation District has reviewed the long-range goals and objectives and has approved them, Myers will return to the RCLWG to get input again.

Sam Lawry with Teller emphasized that there are agricultural lands that really should not be farmed no matter what practices are used, and the Group agreed that conservation rather than production should be the focus of BCD’s efforts. Myers added that when the BCD’s long-range plan was created in 1980, ag land conservation was identified as a priority.

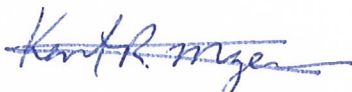
Actions

- 1) NRCS and RC&D will meet with the Forest Service to identify the specific Forest Health areas of resource concern.
- 2) Myers will present the proposed Goals and Objectives for the BCD’s long range plan to the BCD for approval.

Next meeting: TBD, none in summer.

Meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

Kent Myers
Chairman



Pam Gouse for Julie Ralston
BCD Administrator

Date: 10-10-2019

Ravalli County Local Working Group Minutes June 5, 2019