



**RAVALLI COUNTY LOCAL WORKING GROUP
(RCLWG)**

Thursday, August 27, 2015

Minutes

1709 North First Street
Hamilton, Montana 59840
(406) 363-5010



Ravalli County Local Working Group (RCLWG) meeting Thursday, August 27, 2015, called to order at 2:00 p.m., by Kent Myers.

ATTENDANCE:

Heather Barber (Bitter Root Water Forum, BRWF), Allen Bjergo (Bitter Root Resource, Conservation, and Development, RC&D), Pam Gouse (RC&D), Zack Miller (MSU Western Ag Research Center, WARC), Kent Myers (Bitterroot Conservation District, BCD), Al Pernichele (BRWF), Julie Ralston (BCD), Matt Whithed (Natural Resources Conservation Service, NRCS)

INTRODUCTIONS

MINUTES

June 22, 2015 Minutes accepted without a motion.

MATT WHITHED, NRCS DISTRICT CONSERVATIONIST:

- A. NRCS' expectations for Local Working Groups: 1) LWGs identify a priority resource that may be defined geographically by resource issue specific, or land use specific for the purpose of focusing local NRCS conservation work. 2) LWGs are to have a broad representation of the county to collaboratively identify and address the resource concerns. 3) LWGs should not identify county resource concerns based on NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) even though it could have a slight impact on the ranking of NRCS EQIP applications. Discussed the expectations for 2016. The RCLWG has in the past identified "Irrigation Efficiency" as its top priority. It will need to identify its resource priority funding by December 2015. Ranking will occur in February.
- B. 2015/2016 Summary of NRCS Projects: Due to a shrinking budget EQIP funds are now State and Area wide rather than County funds. The Missoula Area EQIP funds cover applicants from Eureka to Whitehall. This is making the EQIP application process a lot more competitive and why it is important for LWGs to identify a priority, thereby giving County applicants a better chance to rank higher in the application review. In 2012 Montana NRCS had state-wide approximately 23 million dollars in EQIP funds. By 2015 those state-wide EQIP funds had been reduced to just 13 million. Ravalli County had 11 EQIP applications in 2015/2016, four of those applications were funded (one irrigation and three high tunnel projects).

The funding for the high tunnels came through a national special initiative. Myers asked to explain the purpose of a high tunnel. Whithed stated, to increase production on already cropped lands. RCLWG discussed the Resource Management System (RMS) and the progressive management on grazing lands, crop lands, irrigation, and forestry.

Discussed Regional Conservation Partnership (RCP) Program. Zack Miller stated his concern on how difficult it is to find public documentation on Ravalli County's top resource priorities. Whithed will send out links for information on the RCP program and NRCS's ranking review.

OLD BUSINESS

- A. Reviewed the top resource concerns from RCLWG meeting held on February 18, 2015. Out of the five identified RCLWG will be limited to one for EQIP purposes. The RCLWG next meeting agenda will include the identification of its number one 2016 priority.
- B. Heather Barber gave a brief update report on the RCLWG's resource spreadsheet. She asked everyone to look over tab two on the spreadsheet to make sure agency information and programs available are correct. Discussed placing active links to the resource spreadsheet on the Bitterroot Conservation District's (BCD) website. Ralston will contact the BCD's web manager.

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Public outreach opportunities will be discussed at the next meeting. It was suggested to contact Tom Ruffatto with the Right to Farm Group, Irrigation Groups, and Ag Producers. RCLWG discussed the development of a handout that could be mailed to producers throughout the county. Gouse suggested the handout be made available for all community members.
- B. Whithed suggested the current Supply Diversion Public Safety Project be considered as an RCLWG collaboration opportunity. This will be discussed at the next RCLWG meeting.

SET NEXT MEETING SCHEDULE

Barber will assist Ralston in setting up a Doodle Poll with two different meeting dates in October.

Meeting adjourned 3:15 p.m.

~~Kent Myers~~
Kent Myers
Chairman

~~Julie Ralston~~
Julie Ralston
BCD Administrator

Date: *10/29/2015*