

RANGELAND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MINUTES
Tuesday, February 6, 2024
1:00 pm – 5:00 pm
Billings Hotel & Convention Center, Billings, MT

PRESENT

Members:

Chair Diane Ahlgren
Member Leah Lewis
Member Sigurd Jensen
Member, John Hollenback
Member, Jim Anderson
Member, Ron Devlin
Advisory Member, Rachel Frost
Advisory Member, Reyer Rens
Advisory Member, Mark Bostrom
Advisory Member, Kevin Derzaph
Advisory Member, Marissa Sather

Staff:

Stacey Barta, DNRC State Rangeland Resources Program Coordinator
Shantell Frame-Martin, DNRC Rangeland Resource Program Specialist

Public:

Jason Derz, Torri Colecorse (Sen, Daines' Office), Connie Iverson, Donna Stafford,
Molly Masters, Joey Growell (Rep. Rosendale's Office)

Call to Order

Chair Diane Ahlgren called the meeting to order at 1:02 pm. Everyone in attendance introduced themselves.

Diane asked if there was a motion to approve the meeting minutes from the October 17, 2023, meeting. Leah motioned to approve the minutes as submitted and Ron seconded. No discussion, motion carried.

NEW BUISNESS:

Stacey provided an update on events, projects, and meetings/conferences she attended November, December and January. Stacey talked about the "Good Neighbor Authority" through Grants.gov. She also mentioned the Western SARE grant and GLCI for this years' 406 Grazing Academy. Stacey also discussed the current NRCS contribution agreement. Ron asked for additional details regarding the "Good Neighbor Agreement" and a short discussion ensued. Stacey noted that the newsletter has 1,700 subscribers and after every month, several compliments are received on it.

Budget update:

Stacey explained the budgetary code breakdown and was excited to share that after 60 years of the RRP being in existence, that it now has organization codes and a budget. Hats off to Mark for accomplishing that feat! Ron asked about the million-dollar fund that was used and Mark explained that was set up from monies provided from the General Fund. Mark also noted that the Rangeland Improvement Loan Program can use more than the set \$1million to get more funds on the ground—there are no limitations. Mark explained that only \$1million was allowed “back in the day” and can be exceeded if a bonding rate could be obtained. Stacey mentioned that there is \$360k in the account so that amount would need to be exceeded before there is a need to bond more for availability.

Shantell provided a brief update on events and tasks she’s completed which mirrored that of what Stacey mentioned.

Diane asked for committee updates.

Leah attended the MSU calving class and said it was a great event. She’s been working on water rights paperwork and filing; she noted that others should have it on their radar if their basin is on the block—she mentioned finding an attorney for advice to do so. Leah also mentioned that the budget for adjudication is 4-6 years.

Ron shared with the group that he’s on the Prairie District Grazing Board and it’s been quiet. His neighbor lost about 25 AUMs due to a new prairie dog town. He noted that in his area that water adjudication is not an issue as there really isn’t any water on private land as most reservoirs are on BLM.

Sigurd shared that he attended the Western Montana Grazing Conference in Missoula at the Missoula County Fairgrounds. He liked that the conference used local foods/products to feed attendees. He mentioned that there were several great topics and the presenters were good. Sigurd also shared that Lake County has a new Conservation District hire (Caroline) and that she’s mentioned having a range tour of some sorts in Western Montana when the weather is nice. Sigurd noted that his area hasn’t received enough moisture this winter.

John informed the group that his area has been working a lot on virtual fencing in Spotted Dog. The FS out of Helena bought two towers and helped a few of the landowners get a grant for the collars. John noted that he’s seen a lot of interest in virtual fencing in his area and said that ranchers are able to collect all of their cattle off of allotments in a more timely manner (usually a day) with the collars. He noted that he thinks virtual fencing is phenomenal and it will make great use of public/federal lands.

Jim started off by saying that, “there’s not a lot going on up in his area.” One notable topic of interest however is that the area ranchers are trying to get the USDA government hunter (through a petition) to come and eliminate some coyotes. Jim noted that there has been an increase in large predators including sightings of grizzly bear, and that his area is the driest in the country with little to no snowpack.

Jim also mentioned that any excess hay from this past summer has been bought up and sold into Canada.

Diane noted that she didn't have anything to report however she's noticed that her area has pretty good sub-moisture.

Advisory Updates:

Walt Anseth (MDA) mentioned that MDA had a meeting with the Governor recently and that MDA is fully staffed. He noted that he thought this next season will be busy with Ag loans due to the drought/lack of winter moisture.

Reyer Rens (BLM) noted that he has new range staff and he's seeking mentors for those folks. He's been fielding a lot of virtual fencing questions and he's waiting on the Public Lands Rule and then BLM will help implement that; Reyer noted that rule will help to establish programs including the grazing program. The mandate will be to take action on land health standards. Diane asked about virtual fencing from the BLM standpoint and a short discussion ensued.

Kevin Derzaph (NRCS) stated that NRCS is looking for range specialists. He also noted that virtual fencing is gaining ground at NRCS and the State Conservationist is encouraging TIPS and standalone practice. Bell Grazing is available for financial assistance. Kevin mentioned that National GLCI has monies available for grants with funds supplied by NRCS; \$16million is available with a \$300k and \$1million cap and either can be applied for. RRP and MT GLCI did not get funded last year, and Kevin was unsure of when that application process opens up.

Rachel Frost (MSU) shared that Stacey is the newly elected Dept. of Animal and Range Advisory Committee member. MSU Rangeland Ecology Major is now accredited by Society for Range Management. A short discussion ensued regarding class size, etc. Rachel also noted that the Dan Scott Program had a program review, and recruitment is a huge focus. Rachel also shared that MSU has officially hired a virtual fencing professor in Precision Ag.

Molly Masters (MRCDC) provided dates for events that they are hosting.

Marissa Sather (USFWS) briefly discussed that the DOI is making historic investments in conservation; investing in projects through partnerships to leverage funds and resources.

Mark Bostrom (DNRC) mentioned that DEQ is putting in for a climate pollution reduction grant for coal seam fires and a discussion ensued regarding this topic.

Stacey mentioned that she also serves on the Montana Ag Experiment Station and that she would like to bring research to producers and other parties who would benefit from research findings for on the ground use.

Diane discussed MSGOT and the duties associated with being a committee member. Jim Anderson noted that he would be willing to fill Diane's spot on MSGOT, Ron

made a motion to have Jim fill the RRC spot behind Diane and Leah seconded.
Motion carried.

OLD BUISNESS:

Strategic Plan-

Members reviewed the Strategic Plan. Jim made the motion to adopt the Strategic Plan, Leah seconded and motion carried.

Bylaws-

Term limits-Section 4. The committee decided that (3) seats will serve on a 2-year term and (3) will serve a 4-year term. The group decided that Stacey/Shantell should look at a map to determine with seats are to be 2-year terms and 4-year terms. Seats will be reappointed in 2025. Ron noted that the Bylaws should contain this information.

Unexcused absences-

The group discussed unexcused absences and it was noted to consider having the chair reach out to the member to discuss the absences and have an outline to replace the person if there are more than the allotted unexcused absences. Diane suggested (3) unexcused absences and Jim agreed. It was suggested to tailor the language after the Conservation District's Bylaws. **Shantell will obtain a copy of these to craft this language for inclusion.

Proxy voting-

Consensus was to not allow this. **Shantell will remove this verbiage from the Bylaws for the next draft.

Diane requested that Stacey/Shantell clean up the Bylaws to include discussion items/edits talked about at the meeting and resend out to the RRC. The goal is to approve these at the next meeting.

Diane briefly discussed MSGOT lease terms, and a short discussion ensued.

NEW BUISNESS:

Working Lands Internship Program (WLIP)-

Stacey informed the group that there were 11 applications and 6 of them fit the criteria. The plan is to do interviews around March 1. Stacey discussed Turner Ranches collaboration, and the opportunity for partnership with Pat Fosse in the Dillon area to host an intern for monitoring. A discussion ensued about the intent of the program and keeping it as educational and not "just paid summer help" to fill worker shortages. The committee requested Stacey get additional information from Pat Fosse to see if that opportunity aligns with the goals and mission of the WLIP.

2024 Meeting Dates:

The RRC will meet the following days/times in 2024:

- May 1 (virtual) to adjust RILP interest rate

- July 17 (virtual)
- A fall meeting (including day/time/ location) in September/October will be decided upon at the May 1 meeting.

Public Comment

No public comment.

ADJOURN

Diane asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Jim made the motion and Leah seconded. No discussion and the motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 3:44pm.

Action Items:

- 1. Update Strategic Plan to reflect edits discussed at this meeting.**
- 2. Update Bylaws to reflect edits discussed at this meeting.**
- 3. Determine 2-year appointments and 4-year appointments—update Bylaws with this information when decided.**
- 4. Stacey will get additional details from Pat Fosse to share with the RRC regarding the opportunity in Dillon for an intern.**