

Northeast Wyoming River Basin
Meeting Record
Moorcroft, WY
November 21, 2002

Welcome

Facilitator Sherri Gregory-Schreiner welcomed the group and the meeting was called to order at 1:04 p.m. All attendees introduced themselves, followed by a review of the overall meeting agenda. A sign-in sheet was passed around to record attendance. The next meeting is scheduled for April 3 in Newcastle.

Water Development Commission Report

Barry Lawrence updated the BAG on the status of the plans for the other basins. The BAGs for the Wind/Bighorn and the Snake/Salt Basins will be meeting December 17 in Powell and December 18 in Jackson. The Bear, Green River, and Powder/Tongue River BAGs met November 18 in Kemmerer, November 19 in Green River, and November 20 in Sheridan. Barry discussed the status of all basin studies, including the Platte River Basin, and schedule for future meetings.

Crook County Resource Advisory Committee

Steve Kozel, US Forest Service, addressed the role of the Crook County Resource Advisory Committee with relationship to the Forest Service and the Payments to States law. In 1908, the 25% Fund Act was enacted to provide states 25% of all revenue received during any fiscal year primarily from timber sales, mineral sales, and grazing fees from each national forest. The funds are to be used for public schools and roads of the count(y)ies in which a national forest is located. Due to fluctuating revenues from the 25% Fund Act, the Payments to States law was enacted in 2000. For each year 2001-2006, a state is allowed to receive an amount equal to the average of the state's three highest 25% payments within fiscal years 1986-1999.

80-85% of the total payment must be used for Title I, road and school projects, whereas the remaining 15-20% funds are used for either county projects (Title III) or special projects on federal lands or on non-federal lands that benefit resources on federal lands (Title II). Steve detailed the types of projects, funding limitations and implementation for Title II projects as well as Title III authorized uses. Approval of Title II projects is assisted by a resource advisory committee (RAC), which is made of 15 local members of various commercial endeavors and local officials. The role of the RAC is to review and recommend projects to the Secretary of Agriculture via the local forest supervisor for final approval. Marlene Simons is the current chairperson of the committee.

Wetlands Reserve Program

Terry Everard, Natural Resources Conservation Service, indicated the primary purpose of the wetlands reserve program is to restore wetland characteristics of selected areas, primarily shallow water areas for waterfowl. Landowners may sell a conservation easement or enter into a cost-share restoration agreement to

enhance wetlands in exchange for retiring marginal agriculture land. There are three options: permanent easements, 30-year easements, and restoration cost-share agreements of a minimum 10-year duration. The landowner may or may not provide public access, while the NRCS and USFWS retain the right to maintain the structure(s). Improvements to the J.O. McDonald property were shown.

Belle Fourche and Powder River Drainages Water Quality Assessment Project

Dee Carroll, Campbell County Conservation District, indicated the assessment project was funded on April 10, 2002 by way of a DEQ 319 grant. Project goals include:

- Comprehensive watershed assessment to identify impaired segments of Little Powder River, Stonepile and Donkey Creeks and to assess baseline information for Dead Horse, Wild Hose, Spotted Horse, LX Bar, SA, Bitter Creeks, and Powder River.
- Provide information/education to the affected interests and general public to encourage public involvement in future planning.

Project benefits include:

- An evaluation of impaired waterbodies to scope the sources of concern,
- an identification of human health concerns,
- an assessment of baseline monitoring of waterbody health, classification status, stream bank stability, and vegetation for future determinations and uses, and
- local commitment from landowners and local entities.

Cooperating team members include the NRCS, city of Gillette, Campbell County Commissioners, Crook County Natural Resource District, and Campbell County Cooperative Extension Service. The project timeline and current status was discussed. Coordinating projects include the Belle Fourche River Watershed Assessment, Planning and Implementation 319 Grant and the Donkey Creek and Gillette Fishing Lake I&E 319 Grant.

Devils Tower National Park Issues

Jim Cheatham, National Park Service, discussed the major issues facing Devils Tower, which is not a destination park, yet still receives 400,000 visitors a year. Jim indicated the need for an updated general management plan. Major issues since the adoption of the 1986 general management plan include congestion, inadequate staff facilities, natural and cultural resource management, boundary concerns, and aesthetics. Of particular note were the water resource and prescribed burn guidelines, climbing management plan, the use of chemicals to treat weeds, and prairie dog towns and associated human interaction. A lengthy discussion followed this presentation.

Black Hills National Forest Issues

Steve Kozel, US Forest Service, indicated that large fires have consumed over 10% of the Black Hills National Forest (BHNF) in 2000-2002. A four-step process has been developed to rehabilitate the burned areas.

- Suppression Rehabilitation. It repairs the damage caused by fighting the fire, and components include fire lines, road damage, and camp clean-up.
- Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation. It assesses the fire for risk of floods and other hazards. Hillslope treatments, roads, and early flood warning(s) are some of its components.
- Rapid Assessments. These are completed to speed decision making.
- Long Term Rehabilitation. It responds to non-emergency needs, such as timber salvage, weed control, facility repair, and range management.

Other events in the forest include epidemic populations of mountain pine beetles and extensive areas of timber damaged by wind, hail, and snow. Steve indicated that the damaged timber increases the fuel load in the forest, and provides areas for beetle populations to explode.

Steve indicated that the Phase II Forest Plan Amendment is underway after adoption of Phase I. Due to a 1999 Forest Plan Appeal decision, the BHNF must re-evaluate species viability. In the Beaver Park and Norbeck areas of the park, activities to reduce the fuel load and prepare offers for timber sales have been initiated. However, the activities were stalled legally and administratively until a negotiated agreement between most parties was signed into law in August 2002. Also affected by the 1999 Forest Plan Appeal decision was the Timber Program.

The National Fire Plan will help protect communities and natural resources. Key points in the plan include firefighting, rehabilitation/restoration, hazardous fuel reduction, and community assistance. Steve further stated that drought and noxious weeds are the most important range issues on the forest. Feasibility studies are currently underway for wood waste power co-generation and an ethanol plant.

In conjunction with the Phase II Forest Plan Amendment, the states of Wyoming and South Dakota are working with the BHNF to provide data and advice. Resource Advisory Committees (RAC), which include the Crook County Resource Advisory Committee, work with the district ranger on projects funded through the RAC legislation. The Forest Service maintains the decision-making role. A Black Hills National Forest Advisory Board was established in 2001 to improve cooperative relationships with individuals, organizations, and agencies. The development of the board's charter and selection of its membership is underway. Currently the RAC has \$132,000 to spend and is soliciting projects.

The meeting adjourned at 4:16 p.m.