

RANGELAND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MINUTES
Wednesday October 18, 2023
8:00 AM-12:00 AM
Boulder Hot Springs, Boulder, MT

PRESENT

Members:

Chair Diane Ahlgren
Member Leah Lewis
Member Sigurd Jensen
Member, John Hollenback
Member, Jim Anderson
Advisory Member, Ellie Brighton
Advisory Member, Reyer Rens

Staff:

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

Public:

Skip Ahlgren, Rancher

Call to Order

Chair Diane Ahlgren called the meeting to order at 8:05 am. Everyone in attendance introduced themselves.

Diane asked if there was a motion to approve the meeting minutes from the August 1, 2023, virtual meeting. Leah motioned to approve the minutes as submitted and John seconded. No discussion, motion carried.

NEW BUISNESS:

Stacey provided an update on events, projects, and meetings/conferences she attended in August and September. Stacey also mentioned the Rangeland Improvement Loan program (RLIP) press release and a discussion ensued. Stacey attended Partnerscapes and John asked her to elaborate on that event. Stacey provided an overview of speakers and discussed the field portion in the Blackfoot; she also discussed the sponsorship the RRP provided to help support that event. She mentioned that there were over 200 people that attended. Stacey mentioned projects that her and Shantell have been working on including updates to the Strategic Plan, RLIP application, updates to the Working Lands Internship Program (WLIP) flier and the RLIP flier, and creation of the save-the-dates for both the 406 Grazing Academy and the Montana Range Tour in 2024. Stacey provided the dates and locations of those events and copies of the save-the-dates were handed out. A quick discussion took place about the amount of RILP loans that are outstanding and that there was one pending new application for \$15,000.

Shantell also provided an update that included elaborating on what Stacey had reported on and included updating the committee about applying for a Western Sustainable Agriculture Resource and Education (SARE) grant. Shantell noted that the deadline was November 1, and asked the committee members for letters of support. Stacey also informed the committee that Shantell has been focused on getting the 406 Rangelands Newsletter out. Stacey noted that there are now 1,500 subscribers to the newsletter and that multiple people comment monthly on how great the newsletter is.

Stacey was asked about the budget, and she reported that there is not a budget set yet. Stacey told the RRC that the Rangelands Program will be getting its own budget code, but she was unsure of when that will happen. She will follow up with Mark (Bostrom) to see where this project is at and will check in with accounting (Bill Herbolich) to see when the code would be ready for use.

Diane asked for committee updates.

Sigurd noted that he has a new conservation district person, Lake County had problems with fire in August/September and he also mentioned that timber thinning projects were going on in his area. He also mentioned issues with jurisdiction between state agencies and the (CSKT) tribe. Jim Anderson asked about the water compact and Sigurd mentioned that Flathead Lake was significantly low—lower than anyone had ever experienced. A discussion ensued.

Jim noted that where he's at the Blackfoot tribe is buying land with monies they received from a settlement with the government. He noted that people are looking for ways to scale back in their farming/ranching operations and taking conservation easements with the government is one way for them to keep their land and not sell their ranches completely. Jim elaborated on easements as a tool instead of selling and a discussion ensued.

Leah has been busy adjudicating her water basin, she also mentioned being frustrated with government representatives over a potential government shutdown because that threat messes with payments and agreements that she/her family have with the government to keep their ranch operating.

Diane noted that in her area there were three producers that were awarded monies from MSGOT. Due to the amounts of the awards the conservation district was facing an audit which has been holding up lease ground and impacting the producers. She also mentioned that they had grasshoppers, calves were 40-90 pounds lighter on average and that calf prices have been good. She also mentioned that the American Prairie Reserve (APR) bought the Two Crow Ranch, and it is being leased by two young people as a year-to-year lease. APR also bought the 73 Ranch in Garfield County, which was rested last year and then the APR asked those managing the Two Crow to lease the 73 as well. A discussion ensued regarding this.

Diane asked Advisory Members to provide an update.

Reyer- BLM: Restoration Landscapes (Inflation Reduction Act) states prioritize funding areas. There are three allocated for Montana: Glasgow/Malta area, Dillon, and Missoula-each of these projects is receiving funding from the feds from this Act. Monies can be spent on weeds, fuels reduction, etc. and partners will know more as details are forthcoming. Reyer mentioned outcome-based restoration and holding funds back for grazing permits for AMP development/capacity is limited because of no one to work. As permits come up for renewal, it would be a good time to review. Grazing rule revision is paused and BLM is working on instructional memorandums on 4 items including drought, trespass, etc.. Staffing continues to be an issue and is hard to keep. There are 6-7 RMS that are closed and they're trying to hire those positions. Society of Range Management (SRM) is helping with position descriptions and professional development. SRM is also working on putting together a curriculum for an academy for Range Management Success. They're working to get people hired and integrated. Those that support this effort include NRCS, FS, BLM and this is the first year that the BLM is partnering with SRM on this. Reyer also mentioned that there's an internal drought tool that they've been using. A discussion ensued about "Ghost Herd" and how the case with Glenn Klammert has impacted the Billings State Office. Diane asked how the RRC can help disseminate information regarding programs he mentioned and to help get the word out about available funds. Reyer mentioned that SRM is trying to help build the range community and to fill a void with their grazing school that is in development.

Range Committee Member Roles and Responsibilities: Stacey brought this up for discussion so that the group could discuss the policy and procedures for members that are not present or who do not attend meetings regularly. Jim asked the question "are you appointed for that governor that appoints you?" Statute does not define terms. MGCC has language that defines even though they are an appointed board. It was suggested to have language in bylaws that defines attendance rules and responsibilities of those on the RRC. Diane suggested some language to address this—something that outlines attendance. Diane noted that if absences are "excused" there should be more leniency, and just communicating with the RRC what is going on and why you are not present... but radio silence and no communication is not acceptable. Diane also mentioned that her local conservation district has rules and verbiage that addresses this, maybe look into this verbiage as something that can be used to help the RRC. Jim suggested that we reach out to whomever makes the appointments through the Governor's Office to seek guidance from.

OLD BUISNESS:

MSGOT- Diane inquired if there is someone who would be interested in taking over her role/responsibility of MSGOT. She mentioned that there are 4 meetings per year. Discussion ensued and committee members asked Diane about the duties of being on the committee. This item was tabled for another time however Leah and Jim were mentioned to be well versed for this responsibility. It was mentioned that an appointed member of the RRC is required to be on the MSGOT board.

Working Lands Internship Program- Stacey outlined the difficulties that have been experienced by the interns/hosts this summer. She also informed the RRC about the

survey that Shantell crafted and sent out to all hosts. There were 34 hosts emailed and 22 of those responded with answers regarding the WLIP. Stacey then asked the group if they would continue to respond with online survey methods including MS forms for the intern evaluation; the group responded with “yes” as they feel it is easier to complete. Leah asked if any new people are hosting or are interested in hosting and Stacey said she has two new potential hosts. Stacey mentioned that from the survey responses she thinks that it may be possible to have one intern for 3 weeks and one to two on a two-week schedule. Stacey outlined the intern’s experience over the three-week span. Jim added that he likes the three-week option, it works better for him. Leah said that two weeks works best for her and suggested that if the shift from two to three weeks happens, that a longer time off for the intern in the middle of the stay would be good for both the host and the intern. Diane said that if Stacey could find a way to make both (two and three week) stays possible, that would be ideal. Stacey then asked the group if applicants should be limited to Montana schools only as applications have come from across the country and that poses logistical challenges. Stacey noted that one of the main issues with students from other parts of the country is that their colleges have different start/end dates and that conflicts with the required safety training that Stacey does prior to interns starting the internship. Jim noted the experience of those from out-of-state to showcase the benefit of ranching and how those benefit everyone. Stacey also helps direct those that do not get hired to other programs that they might qualify for/benefit from in Montana. Leah suggested limiting it to degree type—to specify range/wildlife ecology/etc. Or include verbiage such as “priority will go to students seeking degrees in X, Y, Z programs.” Stacey then suggested just prioritizing applications through the review process instead. The group agreed that if a student cannot physically attend the required safety training that means you will not be hired. This needs to be put on the application in bold lettering.

Stacey posed the question to limit the internship opportunity to juniors/seniors and a discussion ensued. It was suggested to possibly have an in-person meeting with hosts at the Stockgrowers Conference in December to have more discussion on this or have a larger virtual meeting this winter to address. Another suggestion was at the Soil Health Symposium in Billings in the spring. This topic was tabled.

Strategic Plan- Is there funding through the RRP to do projects? Yes, there is. Sagebrush Collaborative/MSU asked if Stacey/Shantell could help write grant project proposals. If there is capacity within the RRP to do that, it could go in the Strategic Plan. Stacey recommended that this topic be revisited next year after Shantell has had a chance to be in the position and “get her feet under her.” RRP would be the fiscal agent on all of the grants as well and then a portion of the grant could be written to compensate the RRP for their services. Discussion ensued and it could be a 10-15% admin fee to help organize events, tours, etc. Stacey is seeing a need for this, and others have asked her about this capacity within the program. Stacey also mentioned that the RRP has the statutory capacity to perform this task. The group discussed and it was asked who oversees grants and agreements and a discussion with them would need to occur. The group tabled this topic for another date. It was asked what the Montana Rangeland Monitoring project mentioned in the Strategic Plan is and Stacey outlined. Leah also asked about the 406 Grazing Academy and why it is limited to 30 people. Stacey briefly outlined the 406 and

informed the group that the event moves around the state and is held in a different location each year. Diane mentioned performance indicators for the RRP, and everyone noted that it is so hard to define a widget to collect/measure the effectiveness of the program. Stacey highlighted the increase of the recipients of the newsletter as a measurable for overall success of the program. Subscribers when from 500 to 1,500 in a year which speaks volumes to interest and promotion of the program. Jim mentioned that Rangeland Appreciation Month needs to be added to the Strategic Plan. Shantell will perform this edit and include text to accompany. Leah also asked for clarification on the Leopold Conservation Award and Stacey defined the parameters of that award. John also commented on the quality of the nominees for that award.

2024 Meeting Dates: Four meetings seem to work for the group (2 virtual, 2 in-person). Leah mentioned that she likes for the RRC meetings to be tied in with something else so there's multi-purpose for attending. Stacey said logistically that is difficult to pull off. As for virtual, May or June work well for the group. It was decided to get the exact day/times for both virtual and in-person after the 1st of the year. John commented on how well the MRT and other events he's attended have gone and that he has been very impressed and enjoyed them. He gave kudos to Stacey and Shantell for great events. Diane mentioned she doesn't like that the RLIP feel like the RRP's program and that she does not feel like it is being promoted as a resource for ranchers. Stacey noted that she should talk to Mark regarding this, and a short discussion ensued regarding the history of the RLIP.

Public Comment

No public comment.

ADJOURN

Diane asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Jim made the motion and John seconded. No discussion and the motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 11:24pm.

Action Items:

- 1. Reach out to the Governor's Office for advice on attendance policy for the RRC.**
- 2. Find an RRC member to replace Diane Ahlgren on the MSGOT board**
- 3. Add "IF YOU CANNOT PHYSICALLY ATTEND THE REQUIRED SAFETY TRAINING FOR THE WLIP YOU WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED" to the application.**
- 4. Add Rangeland Appreciation Month to the Strategic Plan.**