

**RANGELAND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MINUTES**  
**Monday March 24, 2025**  
**Noon – 5:00 pm**  
**DNRC Headquarters, Helena, MT**

**PRESENT**

***Members:***

*Chair Diane Ahlgren*  
*Member Leah Lewis*  
*Member Sigurd Jensen*  
*Member, John Hollenback (attended virtually)*  
*Member, Jim Anderson*  
*Member, Ron Devlin*  
*Advisory Member, Rachel Frost*  
*Advisory Member, Mark Bostrom*  
*Advisory Member, Shawn Heinert*  
*Advisory Member, Megan Terry*  
*Advisory Member, Sara Smith*  
*Advisory Member, Carmen Dreiling (attended virtually)*  
*Advisory Member, Ellie Brighton*

***Staff:***

*Stacey Barta, DNRC State Rangeland Resources Program Coordinator*  
*Shantell Frame-Martin, DNRC Rangeland Resource Program Specialist*  
*Janelle Painter, DNRC Accountant*  
*Therese Hartman, Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team*

***Public:***

*Skip Ahlgren*

**Call to Order**

Chair Diane Ahlgren called the meeting to order at 12:05 pm. Everyone in attendance introduced themselves.

Diane asked if there was a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. John motioned to approve the Consent Agenda as submitted and Sigurd seconded. No discussion, motion carried.

**NEW BUISNESS:**

Stacey noted that she has not heard from the Governor's Office so it was decided that the committee will wait to elect new officers until notice is received from the Governor's Office on who has been selected to be on the committee. Stacey noted that hopefully things will be resolved by the May meeting.

There were no other actionable items.

### **Updates:**

Mark Bostrom and Stacey provided a brief budget update. Stacey mentioned that the Western SARE grant funds have been cleared and are available for the RRP to use. Mark noted that BLM funds have to go through a new review to make sure that there is nothing that conflicts with the President's executive orders before certain monies can be released for use. Mark also provided an update for the Rangeland Improvement Loan Program; he received a quote from the Board of Investments to manage the Program's loans and the quoted cost would be \$2,400 instead of the \$7,000 that is being charged for the loans to be managed within DNRC. There was discussion on this and the 1% application fee that is currently being charged was asked where those funds were going. Mark said that he would investigate this and get back to the committee with an answer. A short discussion ensued, and Mark outlined the proposed improvements to the Range Improvement Loan Program; all of which would be beneficial to the RRC. Janelle Painter the new budget analyst, was in attendance for her introduction, and she was able to answer questions regarding new processes and procedures she is working on since taking over the position. Stacey and Shantell praised Janelle and thanked her for her efforts as she's hit the ground running and has been very helpful in providing budget updates and reports for the program.

Stacey noted that at Rangelands in the Rotunda on 3/25/2025, John Hollenback would be recognized by Director Kastor for his 48 plus year commitment to the Rangeland Resources Committee and prior Old West Regional Commission.

### **Strategic Plan Review**

The committee took time to review and comment on the current Programmatic Strategic Plan. Stacey and Shantell will work to complete edits suggested by the committee and provide an updated draft for their review for 2026 prior to printing.

There was discussion about the RRP's programmatic budget and the loan amount for the Rangeland Improvement Loan Program. The committee would like to see the available amount go up to \$1million. This is a goal for the committee for the 2027 session. Mark noted that the executive budget is started in the spring of 2026 and the governor's budget is due in November prior to the session.

Jim Anderson asked if surveys from events are used, and Stacey outlined that "yes" surveys are used to both improve events and to meet attendees' interests; that's how the level 2 406 Academy came to fruition.

Diane Alhgren asked Mark about the status of the Pollution Reduction grant; Mark noted that the grant is showing as "active" in the system due to an injunction that was filed in Maryland however, if it goes through it needs to pass Montana HB4 for federal spending. Mark noted that DNRC had to rescind the employment offer to the person they had hired to manage the grant within DNRC. The committee questioned if the money goes through, what coordination between the RRP and Measure 6 would look like. Mark briefly discussed the logistics of the grant (5-year grant, \$10million with \$6million for projects and \$4million for administration). A few

notable deliverables of the grant would be to measure carbon sequestration on rangelands and measures to address coal seam fires. A short discussion ensued.

### **State Lands Representation**

Diane had asked if a state lands representative could be included in the RRC. Stacey reached out to Kelly Motichka, who is the DNRC Ag & Grazing Bureau Chief in Trust Lands and Kelly agreed to be on the committee. Stacey and Shantell will update communications lists and ensure that they are included for future RRC communications.

### **Rangeland Appreciation Month**

Stacey and Shantell briefly discussed plans for Rangeland Appreciation Month promotion. Those in attendance were supportive; Megan Terry with MT Grazing Lands Coalition offered promotional assistance as did Sara Smith from Montana Association of Conservation Districts. In addition, if anyone on the committee has ideas or topics to highlight, they will send to Stacey/Shantell.

### **Diane asked for Committee Updates:**

Leah Lewis noted that their ranch is calving. She also mentioned concerns over the recent federal administrative changes within federal agencies as grant funds are frozen.

Sigurd Jensen shared that his ranch is also calving, and his area has not had much moisture. He noted that the snowpack is good and grizzly bear corridors are being installed along Highway 93 and that his local area NRCS is still staffed.

Ron Devlin discussed that windmill development on various federal lands in his area have caused concern with his local grazing districts.

Jim Anderson mentioned that feeder steers had gone for \$5/lb, and Walmart hamburger is \$7/lb. He also discussed the St. Mary's Siphon project and highlighted the fact that the entire basin up there will be without water for all of 2025 which impacts 140,000 irrigated acres. At his local NRCS there were 2 engineers that were let go due to their probationary period restriction, but the project is still going. Jim discussed the St. Mary Siphon in detail and answered questions about the project logistics that he knows and mentioned that there is going to be a water deficit in the area from 2025-2027.

John Hollenback noted that some snow fell in his area in February and asked about the new appointees as he joined the meeting late and missed that update. He also mentioned that there are 14 producers that are using virtual fence in his area on FS grazing allotments.

Diane Ahlgren discussed that the federal funding freeze is impacting Winnett ACES and local producers with grants, etc. She also stated that she was going to testify on a bill in the MT legislature to start managing wilderness study areas as she is

familiar with one in her area and management should be required by the federal government to help prevent wildfires.

Shawn Heinert discussed that there are no new agreements from the FS, they're on a continuing resolution for funding, and staffing is tough in the range department throughout the region. He also mentioned that there is a proposed reduction in force coming in April across the agency and that might impact additional range staff. Shawn also mentioned that there is a ton of interest in virtual fencing and that the FS is building flexibility into grazing permits for permittees. Other topics Shawn brought up included carbon market interest from the FS on permits, the "Futuring Exercise" they're working on, NEPA updates, there are 37 vacant allotments across the region, and Shawn recommended the Stocksmart app for producers that was developed with the help of the Rocky Mountain Research Lab in Missoula.

Rachel Frost mentioned that the federal funding freeze has impacted MSU. She also provided updates on enrollment in the College of Ag and how her program is doing at MSU.

Diana asked for a break in committee member updates so that the selected Working Lands Interns, Isak Lenz and Savannah Deuter could introduce themselves to the committee.

Carmen Dreiling with the BLM shared that they are short staffed and probationary hires had been fired and then rehired. She noted that there is uncertainty with the Reduction in Force and early retirements, so more positions may be lost in the coming months. She also noted that the BLM produces newsletters. The committee would like to send them to Shantell so that items from the BLM can be included in the 406 newsletter for distribution.

Megan Terry with MT GLC was hired November 2024 and provided updates on the grants they offer along with an update regarding GLC's intention to hire a grazing specialist. She also informed the committee about the grazing seminar that GLC is planning in September focusing on the power of collaboration. Megan also offered to help with any social media outreach that the RRP has.

Sara Smith with MACD updated the committee on the fact that their NRCS agreement is still intact for now and provided updates on projects including the Montana Conservation Menu, 319 funding for Ranching for Rivers, and offered assistance to help the RRP distribute materials to their audiences.

Therese Hartman with the Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team provided an informative presentation to the group about MSGOT's outreach efforts to date and was there to answer any questions the committee had.

### **Meeting Type Discussion**

The committee agreed that one meeting in Helena every March is a good idea and four meetings a year works great. Meeting dates for 2025 were approved in the Consent Agenda.

2025 Meeting Dates:

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

- May 20, 8am-11am (virtual) to adjust RILP interest rate
- July 22 8am-11am (virtual)
- A fall meeting (including day/time/ location) in September/October will be decided upon at the May meeting.

**Public Comment**

No public comment.

**ADJOURN**

Diane asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ron made the motion and Leah seconded. No discussion and the motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 3:42 pm.