



## FireSafe Flathead Meeting Notes, December 1, 2022

**NEXT MEETING:** Wednesday, January 18, 2023, 9-11am at DNRC Office and Zoom

*Our Mission: We are individuals, neighborhoods, organizations, and agency wildfire professionals working to create and support Fire Adapted Communities and resilient landscapes by providing leadership, technical assistance, and resources.*

### Recent news & events:

- GRANT APPLICATION PERIOD OPEN! Wood products infrastructure assistance to facilities that purchase and process byproducts of ecosystem restoration projects - <https://www.fs.usda.gov/science-technology/energy-forest-products/wood-innovation>
- Montana Wildland Fire Preparedness Guide - <https://www.fireadaptedmontana.org/resources>
- The Big Burn Podcast - <https://laist.com/podcasts/the-big-burn>
- Governor's Housing Task Force - <https://deq.mt.gov/about/housing-task-force>

### Articles:

- Community Wildfire Defense Grants: Demographics and funding affect wildfire resilience - <https://www.fs.usda.gov/features/science-shows-demographics-and-funding-impact-wildfire-resilience>
- Fuel treatments and bark beetles combine for forest change - <https://www.fs.usda.gov/rmrs/science-spotlights/fuel-treatments-and-bark-beetles-combine-forest-change>
- Researchers design model that will predicts which buildings will survive a wildfire - <https://wildfiretoday.com/2022/11/07/researchers-design-model-that-they-say-predicts-which-buildings-will-survive-wildfire/>

*"It's not always about what or how much you know, so much as it is about connecting the right people, at the right time, in the right place." -Richard Parrish, Bureau of Land Management*

### Action items:

- A spreadsheet of grants, opportunities, dates and deadlines, max & min, parameters. – Ali
- Status of Burn Permit system – Dylan Kopitzke
  - The current system is failing, and we are exploring interagency-supported options for the future. Dylan has drafted a whitepaper addressing issues and will schedule to present to the County.
- How can we better communicate w/landowners what funding opportunities exist at this time/place, when opportunities are evolving? This is an ongoing issue.
- Pile burning workshop – will plan for spring 2023 with Lincoln taking the lead at Herron Park and fall of 2023 with Rick Trembath taking the lead at FLL.
- Lincoln with Henry (Fire Adapted Montana Learning Network) about creating the sprinkler handout that would benefit more people across the state.

**0900 – Welcome & Introductions:** Mike West (Flathead NF Tally Lake RD AFMO), Ali Ulwelling (DRNC Forestry Assistance), Rick Trembath (fire historian, educator), Henry DeLuca (Fire Adapted Montana Learning Network coordinator), Scott Countryman (Goosehead Insurance), Mike Frost (sparkplug!), Deb Starling (NW MT Hazardous Fuels Program and more), Ben Devall (Chief, Big Mountain FD), Lincoln Chute (Flathead County OES, Fire Warden), Logan Sandman (Libby Unit FMO), Richard Hildner (FBAN & retired firefighter, NF landowner), Marlee (National Forest Foundation), Toby Thompson (Flathead NF AFMO-fuels), Nick Aschenwald (DNRC

operations), Mark Newbold (Glacier Hills Firewise Community), Jack White (DNRC Service Forester & Swan Valley Fuels), Dylan Koptizke (DNRC NWLO FMO).

**Mike West – Welcome, introductions and call for agenda items.**

**Richard Hildner** – A lot of snow in the North Fork this morning, so must get the plow fixed! Will be approaching the City of Whitefish Architectural Review Committee with the [International Wildland Urban Interface \(WUI\) Code](#) standards and fire safe communities. Also looking into the [Governor’s Housing Task Force report](#) that includes a decrease in setbacks to 5-feet that is concerning. **Ali has shared with the DNRC Fire Protection Bureau for awareness moving forward.**

**Lincoln Chute** – NFPA recommends at least 30-foot setbacks, properties increasingly have fences, and he has been using a video showing the effect of fences on fire spread. **There is a statewide wildland fire committee next week with DNRC and the state fire warden where he will bring this to their attention.**

**Mike Frost**- Has been working with Ernie and Elkhorn now has their Firewise Status updated—they have been Firewise since 2005! Mike is talking with his neighbor (a student of architecture at MSU) about working on a Firewise Landscape Architecture project where we can work together to create high-quality visuals to help landowners and professional landscapers. We have reached out to Henry with the Fire Adapted Montana Learning Network to join our small working group and move this project forward (Mike and Mike, Ali, Henry..). Allen added that people may not LIKE the open canopy look of Firewise recommendations, but it opens up the sight distance for wildlife and they DO like that.

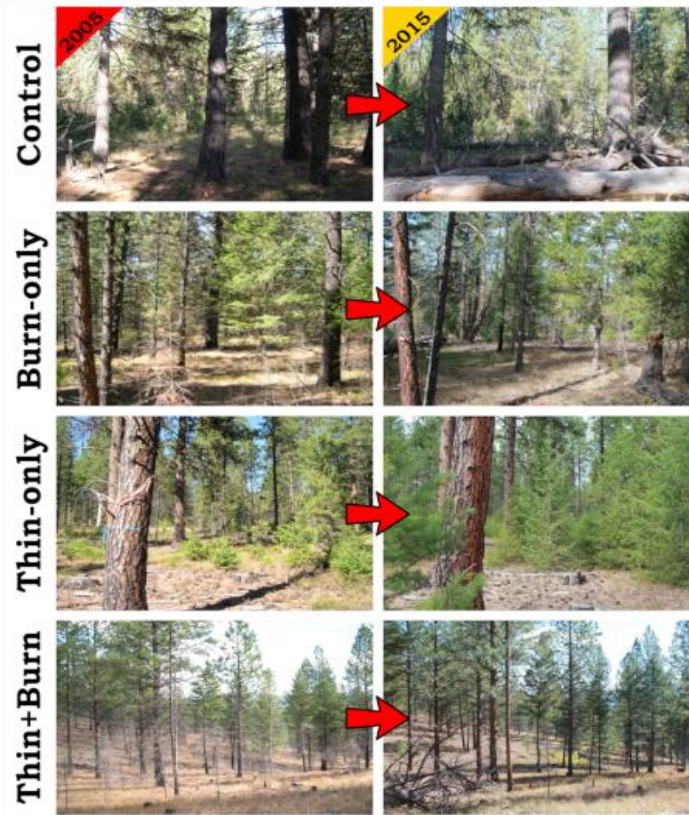
This led to conversation about the need to have more before and after photos of projects to share and have available on the FireSafe Flathead website. We all have them but would like to compile and have available to show landowners what projects can/will look like. **\*\*Please send photos to Ali!\*\***

Examples:

- <https://www.tetonconservation.org/wildfire-risk-management>
- <https://www.fs.usda.gov/rmrs/science-spotlights/fuel-treatments-and-bark-beetles-combine-forest-change>

### Hazardous Fuels Reduction





#### NRCS notes from Sean Johnson & Karli Becher–

- Working on hiring a new NRCS forester in Kalispell to help with workload capacity issues
- Just wrapped up our open window to accept new applications for 2023
  - Ended up with 70 EQIP applications across all active project areas
- [Project Summaries](#) (link to project funding areas)
  - **Joint Chiefs** - Very high interest across the project area, some hot spots have shown up with HOA's getting on board to spread the news about the opportunity to their members
  - **Wedge Canyon** - Large jump in interest from last year, good to see momentum seems to be building up there. Big thanks to Allen and the rest of the North Fork Fire Mitigation Committee for trying to push the EQIP program to those eligible landowners
  - **Little Bitterroot Lake** - Continued strong interest around Little Bitterroot Lake
  - **Ashley Lake** - Large drop off in interest this year however we have already contracted 1,129 acres in 3 years while our initial goal was to contract 1,000 acres over 5 years so we have hit it really hard and as a result of early interest, the number of acres left to treat is greatly reduced
- **Inflation Reduction Act-** NRCS is expected to see a moderate bump in funding in 2023 because of the IRA but our allocated program dollars are expected to close to double heading into 2024 and take another large leap in 2025. Internal discussions taking place currently on how we are going to be able to administer that large of an increase in funds with our current staffing levels.

**Allen Chrisman**, NF mitigation Committee – They held really successful events last summer and are starting to get dates on the calendar for summer 2023—stay tuned! All of this work is connected—the work around the home, the neighboring public lands, fire scars, and prescribed fire. They recently updated their Firewise status and found that the actual in-kind investment in Firewise work (\$77,000!) far exceeded what was required (\$14,000). Well done, North Fork!!

**Ali Ulwelling, DNRC** – FireSafe Flathead and the DNRC just purchased 1500 of the Fire Adapted Montana guides and they will be available for wide distribution. Mike and Ali were in the Cross Boundary Coordination Group meeting yesterday and feel we are doing well, in a good place, with our coordination here. We can take a look to where we can improve in the coming year. They are looking at increased investment in the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) program as a way to get more of the cross-boundary work completed so will be working closer with that program.

**Nick Aschenwald, DNRC** – Across the Northwest Land Office we should have 7 GNA foresters—3 on the Flathead, 3 on the Kootenai, and 1 program manager, in place soon.

**Deb Starling, NW MT Hazardous Fuels** – They are busy wrapping up their remaining agreements by the end of the year. Deb will be preparing a summary of their history for the next meeting as well as prepare to hand off landowners that have contacted them and are interested in program funding. We will gather in person (Deb, Holly, Ali, Sean, Karli, Mike) after the holidays to start that transition and see how we can best divide the work and collectively serve interested landowners.

*A huge THANK YOU to Deb and all for all of their forester staff for the work that they have accomplished over many years. They have helped so many landowners across Flathead, Lincoln, and Sanders Counties and have truly made a difference in our forested landscape.*

**Lincoln Chute** –

Would like to suggest that we are better about providing comments on projects when they come through.

(We've shared this before but will do so more often and provide links when possible. This is where people can go to see a variety of **projects** in various phases on the Flathead National Forest. There is a link for comments in column on the right.)

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/flathead/landmanagement/projects>

Those 5-acres of piles at Herron Park from the summer did not get burned before snowfall so are ready to go for spring and may be a good spot for a workshop if we'd like to host one. **Lincoln will help coordinate and lead a spring pile burning workshop.**

Have also been looking at biochar and curtain burning as an option for disposing of forest debris.

**Biochar demonstration** at Gold Creek in October: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLbg5WbMedA>

There is new leadership in at the County Public Health Department (Jen Rankowsky) and may be an opportunity to connect about burn permits and burn seasons.

**Flathead County Environmental Health** has made some updates to their website including accessibility of forms- <https://flathead.mt.gov/department-directory/health/environmental-health/air-quality-and-ventilation> **Ali has followed up on this to get updated contact emails and invite to partner in more closely coordinated smoke and AQ info sharing.**

The County is also discussing options for helping to fill the gap left by the departure of NW MT Hazardous Fuels and we will be following up.

**Rick Trembath** – Would like to include AQ folks and perspective in the pile burning workshops and the presentations at FVCC—great idea! FLL will be treating 100-150 acres/year for the next several years so there will be opportunities for more workshops. Also shared a timely reminder that this summer is the 20<sup>th</sup>

anniversary of the Wedge Canyon Fire, the area where the NRCS TIP is currently working with landowners and an opportunity to use that for messaging.

**Logan** – Shared that in Lincoln County they invited AQ personnel to field visits when they were using the curtain burner, they have built a relationship by having each share more about what they are doing and why, leading to a greater understanding in, and approvals of, their burn operations.

**Ben Devall**, Big Mountain - They have updated their Firewise certification and are still fielding questions about the feasibility of a second egress of the Mountain, people may be contacted about this.

**Mike West and Toby Thompson**, FNF – Projects are ongoing with log trucks heading out of the Good Creek area (upwind from Olney) and will be hauling from the [Jack Knife](#) timber sale soon. Twin Lakes timber sale at Farm to Market and Bootjack Road including a shaded fuel break for the community—a road system buffered and connected by fuel breaks is safer for firefighters and landowners. Long term plan is to connect Star Meadows to the Stone Mountain Estates area (where Deb was working). JC project area is moving right along including cross boundary work at Pete’s Ridge (500-ac) with State Trust Lands and FWP at Kuhn’s WMA. [Lake Five project](#) is going strong, [Crystal Cedar](#) in the lower North Fork, and Lindbergh Lake down the Swan.

**Scott Countryman (Goosehead Insurance)**— There is NW Association of Realtors meeting coming up Feb 1 and he has signed up for a 3-minute timeframe to talk about fire. We can introduce FireSafe Flathead, the publications available to homebuyers to help them understand the setting they are moving in to, invite them to the FVCC presentations coming up in March. There will be 50 realtors in person and another 50 online.

**Events coming up! (Some dates yet to be finalized and more to come)**

**Wednesday or Thursday, February 22 or 23 at FVCC – Pile Burning Workshop** (Ernie, Rick) – “Landowners use spring and fall Open Burn seasons to dispose of forest debris resulting from fuels reduction, forest management projects, or simple yard clean up. Become more familiar with how and where to construct, and how to safely and effectively burn piles, as well as burn permit requirements and air quality regulations. Hosted by FireSafe Flathead and Montana DNRC.”

**Wednesday or Thursday, March 1 or 2 at FVCC (Ali not available) – Intro to Forestry for Landowners** (Holly and Jack White) – “Whether you have a few acres or far more, ownership comes with an opportunity to learn about your trees, wildlife habitat, weeds, and more. Join DNRC Service Foresters Holly McKenzie and Jack White for an introduction to basic forestry and start to see the benefits of actively engaging with and managing your land.”

**Thursday, March 9 at FVCC – History of Fire in NW MT** – Rick Trembath and co.

**Wednesday or Thursday, March 15 or 16 at FVCC – (Ali not available) Prepare for Fire Season** (Ernie and co.) – “Living in the fire-dependent forests of northwest Montana means there will always be a fire season, and there are many actions we can take to prepare our families, homes, properties, and communities for wildfire. Join interagency fire managers for a presentation and discussion covering ignition-resistant construction concepts and home hardening, creating and maintaining a safer Home Ignition Zone, local fuels reduction programs, evacuation planning, and more. Hosted by FireSafe Flathead.

**Saturday, April 8<sup>th</sup> – Glacier Hills Firewise Day**

**Saturday, April 22<sup>nd</sup> – Many Lakes Community Wildfire Preparedness Day**