

## **Firesafe Flathead meeting, Wednesday, September 20 9-11am**

**In attendance:** Mike West, Ali Ulwelling, Brad Abell and Pete Melnick (Flathead County Commissioner and Administrator), Murphy McGowan (CWDG grants), Carrie Johnson (Montana West Economic Development/NW Montana Hazardous Fuels), Jeremy Pris (Kalispell Unit FMO), Gary B (NEPA Team Leader HHGV FNF, planning shop), Brook Blakely (DNRC Good Neighbor Authority), Dylan Kopitzke (DNRC NWLO fire and forestry program manager), Carey Steiner (Good Creek resident), Richard Hildner (North Fork), Scott Countryman (Goosehead Insurance), Rick Trembath (fire), Mike Frost, Paul Okerberg, Randy Sundberg (Many Lakes HOA), Cole Hadley (Whitefish Fire Chief), Amanda Opp (Flathead Electric Coop), Holly McKenzie (Kalispell Unit DNRC Service Forester), Lincoln Chute (Flathead County OES), Sean Johnson & co w NRCS.

\*\* Need to pull together the list of grants, deadlines, parameters, contacts, admin... the Stewardship program is working on this, but we should make sure we have something to share.

\*\* Need to get something on the calendar for this fall, a postfire season discussion and invite landowners who were impacted by the fires this past season.

\*\* Need to get topics on the list for spring wildfire/forestry presentations at Flathead Valley Community College.

### **Introductions**

**Mike West, Flathead NF** – Carol Daly recognition and awareness of the memorial service that will be planned for October (talk with Deb or Bill Swope), Fire season wrap up & work on suppression repair on local fires, prescribed fire planned on every district, some high profile burns in Whitefish municipal watershed and Taylor Hellroaring, DNRC has 3 more units on the Stillwater and maybe 2 on the Swan Unit. They are starting to use drones for aerial ignition on rx and wildfire with the only qualified operator on the Spotted Bear RD (safer, less exposure).

Fires of concern this summer: East Fork, Nirada, Ridge, River Road East, Tin Soldier Complex-- each for different reasons and values at risk.

**BIL CE (Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Categorical Exclusion) Fuel breaks** on the Flathead National Forest, working on “shaded fuel break projects” reducing surface fuels and ladder fuels (photo from Ridge Fire and Desert Mountain shared by Toby Thompson), map of Ashley Lake/Tally Lake RD looking at the Fuel Break Units. The benefits of doing this work ahead of time, the ability to work across ownerships, the receptive nature of private landowners to this work on the Ridge Fire. Good Creek Fuel project area, intermediate commercial and non-commercial thinning and forest improvement (no regeneration treatments), HHGV fuel break units. Implementation this coming field season, working in partnership with DNRC GNA program (Ashley Lake). *Comments are open now and through tomorrow.*

**NRCS Sean Johnson** – Introducing Alec! New Soil Conservationist with forestry education and background, happy to be here.

They have been wrapping up 4 forestry projects – 1) Ashley Lake TIP (last year 2024), 2) Little Bitterroot, 3) Joint Chiefs’ (working on another application for 2025), 4) Irrigation in Lower Valley. Anticipating a doubling of funds next year with IRA funds in 2024. Flathead County/Kalispell area - 39 contracts/2.4 million, Lincoln County/Eureka area - 79 contracts/3.6mill, 950k into irrigation the rest going into forest

projects. Mike, MWED, DNRC working to share private landowner contacts and coordinate. Way more interest than they can serve in a year. **OCT 27 is the sign-up deadline for any of the areas for 2024.** Average \$1100/acre reimbursement for landowners, 1300-acres to be treated.

**Lincoln Chute** – Working with the Parks Director to find a way to get Flathead County Parks treated. Emphasize the value of commenting on FNF projects. (?) Any way to share the cost of the road maintenance with the increase in forestry work/hauling logs from the NF? Work with GNA restoration funds? Working with Chiefs on additional areas of interest, and working with Bonneville, FEC, BN to work on ways to protect infrastructure using supplies, wrap.

**Carrie Johnson, MWED** – Just allocated all of Foothills 134-acres (a few over target), including some work on County Parks in Many Lakes. Closing date of April 2025. JC (\$100,000) - Haven't started with JC due to some insurance carrier policy adjustments. Working on 2 Hazardous Fuels proposals (\$100k each): 1) Somers/Lakeside 2) South Lakeside. CWDG (Community Wildfire Defense Grant) – Working on content next week, working with FEC. 4<sup>th</sup> Hazardous Fuels proposal being worked up for North Woods area (base of the Big Mountain Road).

*\*Coordinate a fuels-coordination meeting for the beginning of December to coordinate landowner interest, grant opportunities, outreach and education.*

**Amanda Opp - FEC** working with a consultant who was successful in applying for past CWDG funds and MWED will be the partner Murphey is available as the SME and can assist with the technical questions as they arise.

**Richard Hildner, North Fork** – Flathead Families for Responsible Growth is interested in hosting another workshop at the O'Shaunessy something a little more active than the film that we showed last time. Molly Shephard is hosting a tour of her Firewise home on Friday.

**Mike Frost, Elk Horn HOA** – Referencing Lahaina wildfire and working to increase awareness using “5 alive” to alert people using loud noises (air horns, air raid siren...) rather than depending on the emergency communications systems in place.

**Carey Steiner, Good Creek area** - connect with Holly, Lincoln, and Mike re: work. Add to the Firesafe Flathead email list.

**Paul Okerberg** – Thank you to NRCS Sean and Karli for all their help in getting funds to cover 100+-acres in the area. More people moving out and great appreciation for work for thinning. Curious about the status of the Round Star project?

**Randy Sundberg, Many Lakes** – Good to hear there will be some fuels reduction in the County Parks within Many Lakes area. A lot of new people who don't seem to be too interested in wildfire.

**Montana DNRC – Jeremy Pris**, “it's still fire season” 1/3 of fires are still outside of fire season, October fall fire season, hunter fires will be a concern, and **burn permits will start up again October 1.** 88 responses with 54 (?) on direct protection, CSKT had a big year with a lot of assistance and coordination, currently working on filling the Fire Adapted Communities Coordinator for the Kalispell Unit (Ernie's old position). Fire crew is now busy transitioning to work with the GNA program up around Good Creek on the Flathead NF, during winter months they will be teaching the classes to county fire departments and preparing for the spring training season. **Holly McKenzie, Service Forester** – gets most requests from the

west side of the valley in the Kila, Truman Creek, Wild Bill, Brown's Meadow, and Patrick Creek; Shelter Valley, Lakeside/Somers, interested in the Haywire Gulch area. **Dylan Kopitzke** – Positions are being announced this fall, remind people about the **burn permits will be required as of October 1 but they don't need a NEW permit, just to activate their existing permit.**

**Ben Deval, Big Mtn Fire** - I am not going to be able to make the meeting. Things happening with us are:

- Starting to work on our Firewise renewal due the end of November.
- Been working with Flathead Electric to determine the possibility of putting power underground or treating the pole so they are no so prone to fire.
- Also have met with DOT to discuss tree removal within their easement.
- Firewise group met and are starting to put together our action annual action plan. Additions will be a community event in March to get the homeowners who are here mostly in the winter. Shortly there will be an arborist removing dead and hazard trees from residents (lots of interest here).
- Whitefish Mtn Resort has been very proactive. They removed brush from around buildings, looked at all their structures and have started to "harden them", added signage during fire restrictions regarding smoking which state you may be held liable if you start a fire. WMR safety Josh and I were in regular contact during fire season and many questions came up that we are working on fixes for.
- Have been working with the Elk Highland HOA to make some changes within their building and landscaping guidelines increase home survivability.

**Rick Trembath** - The last topic on the agenda is if to do public presentations at FVCC next late Winter / Spring related to Fire Education. I would be willing to present "NW Montana Wildfire History" and a "Pile Burning" education session. I think that there is a real lack of public understanding and acceptance of prescribed fire - would that topic warrant a 2 hour educational presentation by agencies at FVCC; say in March?