

11/15/2023 FireSafe Flathead Notes

Dylan Kopitzke, NRCS +2, Bill Mulholland, Richard Hildner, Lincoln Chute, Brad Able, Kelly Kulseth, RJ Hannah, Caleb Dietz, Paul Okerberg, Logan Sandman, Marlee Ostheimer, Randy Sundberg, Marcel Gatzke, Pete Melnick, Mike West, Henry Deluca.

Flathead Ridge Ranch

- Submitted DNRC grant application for shaded fuel breaks to protect adjacent communities based on feedback from incident management teams managing past large fires on and near the ranch.
- Working to get private parcels on board to complete fuel breaks across multiple ownerships.
- Goal is to accomplish 25 miles of shaded fuel break which 5 miles is already complete 1 chain (66') each side of road.
- Other benefits of completing shaded fuel breaks.
 - o Thinning dense productive forest increases stand resiliency to fire in increases growth.
 - o Connecting open public roads to improve firefighting access.
 - o Protecting tribal infrastructure.
 - o Planting native pollinator mix on landing piles to reduce weed and improve pollinator habitat.
- Working to keep website updated, questions reach out to Caleb and Stan.
- Please pay attention to signage, watch out for log trucks/equipment working on the ranch.

MT DNRC & Fire Adapted Learning Network

- New grant opportunity \$500-\$2000 for local fire adaptation community work... creative and flexible. Notice of funding opportunity will be out soon Henry Deluca is the point of contact.
- NW Land Office Forestry Asst. Specialist filled and will start Dec. 4th.
- New service forester position opening on the Stillwater State Forest.
- New Community Preparedness at NW MT area level.
- Montana West Economic Development... working to get a grant for South of Kila, Coon Hollow Truman Creek area \$300K.

North Fork Fire Mitigation

- Want to recognize Molly Sheppard for the work she has accomplished for her community in the NF regarding fire mitigation. Thank you!
- Working on Firewise renewal for the NF this week.
- NF CWPP is in the process of being updated and risk assessment goal is to have it complete this winter.
- Private land pile burning of landings and other piles.
- New online burn permit process is difficult due to lack of connectivity in the NF.
- Marcel Gatz question asked if the NF would share your firewise/risk assessment community paperwork as an example for similar communities in Lincoln County. Mike West will facilitate.
- Forest Service Frozen Moose project implementation update. 500 acres GNA of non-commercial work looking to move forward. Two separate timber sale bids have not been acceptable, so it is going to be repackaged again. The poor condition of the NF road in the summer has been cited as a concern for potential bidders. Funding was requested by the forest service in partnership

with the MT DNRC to provide matching funds for Flathead County in improve the condition of the NF road for the next 3 years so hopefully that will make the Frozen Moose timber sale contract more appealing to bidders.

NRCS

- Sean Johnson and Karli Becher are in Billings at another meeting this week.
- Currently writing forest management plans and certifying pile burning.
- Application window closed for TIPs and Joint Chiefs.
- Meeting with the forest service in early December to coordinate another Joint Chiefs application.

Flathead County

- Thanks to the forest service and DNRC for filling prevention positions. This will help the county immensely.
- Looking at fuel reduction in Many Lakes with Foothills Road grant funding, met with Holly Mackenzie and Mark Vesser and evaluated the County Parks. Plan to reduce fuel loading and improve forest health issues primarily in the Douglas fir due to root disease and beetle activity. Mark Vesser recommended winter work to limit ground disturbance due to proximity to the many lakes and wetlands.
- Working with Forest Service and MT DNRC on an agreement to treat Flathead County Land in the Ashley Lake area. Flathead County plans to utilize revenue from timber receipts to match future fuel reduction grants on county lands.
- Excited about North Fork Road dust abatement cost share to fix road to improve the feasibility for forestry projects.
- Randy Sundberg says thank you for planning fuel reduction work on the County Parks in the Many Lakes area.
- Lincoln would like us to get a smaller more focused meeting with the new prevention/mitigation folks to strategize on how we can freshen things up similar to how we did the Era of Mega Fire presentations in the past.
- Many Lakes County right of way thinning shouldn't be an issue just requires some communication and coordination.

Many Lakes HOA

- April 20th Living with wildfire event.
- Working with county to reduce fuel loading along road right of way.
- Recommends Many Lake HOA and Flathead County do a public meeting for county parks forest management project.
- Ingress/Egress is a concern for the Many Lakes community however do not know where the fire is going to be so wouldn't know what route to take. It should be sheriffs and or firefighters' responsibility to recommend the best egress based on the fire location and situation because there are numerous ways in and out.
- Leave early, know more than one route out, shelter in place may be better option than being caught in a vehicle.
- Reverse 911 is going out to bid this winter which will help inform the public during emergencies.
- North Fork has examples of short-term rentals they will share with Many Lakes.

- 245 acres of thinning through grants over the years which is a good start however we need to keep thinning to reduce fuel loading.

Highland Meadow

- Burning slash piles this fall and really like the online burn permit system.
- Looking for assistance burning piles.
- Thanks to NRCS for the funding to do thinning and fuel reduction work.
- Appreciate the group and forest service efforts and looking forward to Round Star project implementation because it will reduce fire risk to Highland Meadow.
- Lincoln mentioned the Homestead is looking to form a fire district and still working on it.

Lincoln County Marcel

- Busy with multiple forest action plan projects, Rabbits Tracks complete, Island Lake fuel breaks and fuel reduction, Bull Lake, and Hwy 56 corridor project on the docket.
- Fire adapted Kootenai working with FS on collaborative projects.
- CWDG \$5.8 million Libby area... hired service forester Vicky Stevens and 6 person fuels crew. Receiving steady applications from outreach effort.
- 5-minute prescribed fire video from for education purposes from Swan Valley Connections and would like to share.

NFF

- Keystone agreement funding is still pending. Plan to hire a staff person to assist with managing contracts on the Flathead National Forest. 6-8 weeks once position is advertised.
- NFF received partnership award for cross boundary work from MT DNRC.
- Funding available to do cross boundary work on adjacent private lands when there is a benefit to the National Forest.

FNF HHGV

- HHGV/SLRD East Valley Fuels project on going working on identifying units/treatment areas and contacting landowners for access to the national forest.
- Looking to be a great cross boundary project within a national high priority fire shed.
- Lincoln sent public contact to RJ for Lake Blaine access.
- Mike will send contact form out with the notes.

FNF TLRD

- Great fall pile burning... Tally Lake Road fuel break piles burned and look great.
- Waiting to hear back from USFWS for Round Star implementation.
- Cyclone Bill large landscape project coming back online for planning this winter.
- Currently have a few key planning vacancies which has slowed down project planning.
- CWPP, HFRA, Lynx/PCT/WUI... WUI issue doesn't make sense to Flathead County so Lincoln plans to dig in so folks aren't left out of the WUI. Example would leave North Fork and a large part of the fire service area out of WUI.

Big Mtn Fire

- Big Mountain Fire District Firewise was renewed in November. Over the year the group/community spent 2015 hours training, educating and mitigating fuel to better prepare for wildfire.
- We worked with Whitefish Mtn. Resort to train staff members identified as a resource within the district Wildfire Incident Action Plan.
- Firewise members continue to meet with Flathead Electric, DOT and County representatives to discuss improving our single egress.
- District brush pick up day removed 14 trailers and 7 pickup loads of brush from residents properties.
- The district property owner database continues to be updated. The Big Mountain Community Website provides wildfire danger updates and is gaining popularity among residents.
- An arborist was contracted and homeowners within multiple subdivisions had 48 dead or hazardous trees removed and cleared lots of deadfall. Additional trees are scheduled for removal throughout November.
- Elk Highland subdivision completed 28 acres of fuel mitigation within their common area.
- Multiple wildfire home assessments were completed.