



## FireSafe Flathead Meeting Notes, January 27, 2022, via Zoom

**NEXT MEETING:** Thursday, February 24. Venue to be determined.

**Meeting Attendance:** Ali Ulwelling (Forestry Assistance, DNRC), Mike West (Partnership Coordinator/Fuels AFMO Tally Lake, Flathead NF), Deb Starling (NW MT Hazardous Fuels program), Sean Johnson & Karli Becher (NRCS), Ben Devall (Chief, Big Mountain Fire Department), Dylan Kopitzke (FMO Northwestern Land Office, DNRC), Allen Chrisman (North Fork Mitigation Committee), Rick Trembath (fire historian), Lincoln Chute (Flathead Fire Service Area Manager), Ernie Nace (Community Preparedness, Kalispell Unit DNRC), Bill Mulholland (District Ranger, Tally Lake RD Flathead NF), Mike Kopitzke (retired DNRC FMO & proactive resident of Lake Five), Don Stephenson (Whitefish Hills proper development board), Andre DuLac (AFMO Fuels, Swan Lake RD), Logan Sandman (FMO Libby Unit, DNRC), Marcel Getz (Fire Adapted Community Coordinator, Lincoln County & Libby Unit DNRC), Rick Connell (Fire & Aviation Staff Officer, Flathead NF), Anna Lang (FEMA board & proactive resident).

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

### EVENTS & ARTICLES:

**\*Flathead National Forest and NRCS Field Office Receive Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Project [HERE](#) \***

**USDA Forest Service – Confronting the Wildfire Crisis [HERE](#)**

**Recent articles – Washinton Post interactive How to Protect Your Home from Wildfires [HERE](#)**

**National Forest Foundation, DNRC, and Montana Forest Collaboration Network** hosted a panel discussion about Wildfire Science with Dr. Mark Finney, Dr. Jack Cohen, and NIMO IC Bea Day, hosted by Dr. Colin Hardy. The recording can be found [HERE](#).

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*"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:

- ☐ **We still need to follow up with Randy Sundberg re: date for Many Lakes presentation if it's taking place this spring**
- ☐ **Ali needs to follow up with Allen re: the filming site that we discussed last summer.**
- ☐ **Ali is (still) working on getting a list of contacts together along with a card for landowners**
- ☐ **Ali needs to follow up with Rick T re: fire history page on website**
- ☐ **Interpretive walking tour? Driving tour?**
- ☐ **Status of Burn Permit system**
- ☐ **Mike Kopitzke interested in short term rental info (Ali will share)**
- ✓ **Date for FVCC presentations: March 22 – Preparing for Fire Season & March 29 – Pile burning**
- ✓ **Home Risk Assessments – Conversation at the DNRC Bureau level (and interagency) re: training, standards, use, and role. We are absolutely performing assessments, and will continue to do so, as an educational tool for landowners.**

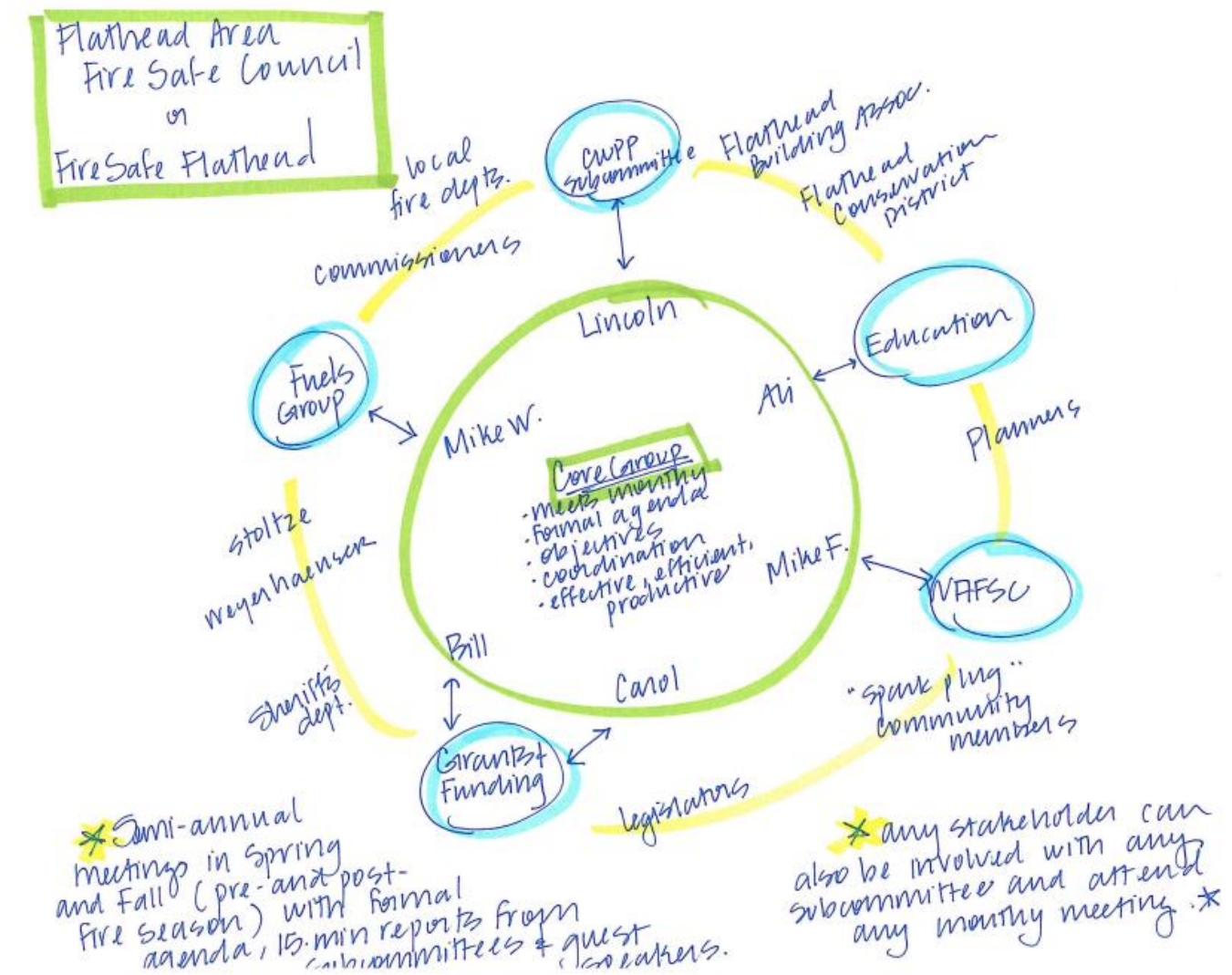
## 0900 – Welcome & Introductions

**Ali Ulwelling** – Thank you all for taking extra time this morning to share more than your name and position, for letting us get to know a bit more about who you are and the deep knowledge and experience that you bring and so graciously share with us.

The seasonal cycle of a fast-paced fire season was followed by a sigh of relief, but now it's time to “dust off those holiday cobwebs” and look ahead with renewed energy, commit to projects and actions identified. Before we move forward, let's take a moment to look back at where we as a group started...

A special moment of thanks for Bill Swope and Carol Daly who were coordinating this work long before we were; without their vision we would not have this community and foundation to grow from. I have been called a “stubborn optimist,” but believe that we ALL must be, as we collectively push forward the efforts that began well before us. Read Carol Daly testifying before congress [HERE](#)— words that apply today more than ever.

Below are notes from our first whiteboard exercise facilitated by Bill Swope in January of 2016. This is something that I like to remember when reflecting on where we were, where we are today, and the strength in the relationships that we have moving forward.



Since then, we have hosted *many* presentations, worked together across agencies to engage with communities, and much more. For those who are just getting involved, here is a *sampling*:

- We have a mission and a [website](#) (always in the works) & FB page to share news & events
- Article - [FireSafe Flathead Meetings Help Landowners Prepare for Wildfires](#)
- Article - [Wildfire Experts Offer History Lesson on the Flathead's Big Burns](#)
- Wildfire in Western Montana – a 4-Part Community Lecture Series at FVCC
- We worked with communities to host Paul Hessburg and [Era of Megafires](#) conversations at over a dozen Fire department locations. This film is now FREE and widely available for sharing! (Stay tuned on a NEW project to be announced soon.... )
- We worked with MSU Extension Forestry and Dr. Peter Kolb to host an in-person [pile burning workshop](#) for landowners interested in learning about how & when to build and burn piles safely. We are now working on our own presentations to share!
- Our partners have together put in countless hours and miles to identify and administer fuels reduction projects that have led to increased connectivity of acres treated across the Flathead landscape.
- We have been communicating about forestry and fire on KGEZ radio in 15-minute segments all year:
  - Gary MaHugh, Creston Fire Chief [HERE](#)
  - Rick Connell, Deputy Fire Staff Flathead NF [HERE](#)
  - Rick Trembath on Fire History [HERE](#)

We are also active participants in the [Fire Adapted Montana Learning Network](#) , where Mike and Deb hosted tours of local projects in the past, as well as the National [Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network](#). Topics discussed have included [Potential Operation Delineations](#) (PODs), the [Unequal Impacts of Wildfire](#) (Headwaters Economics), continuing coordination with [Shared Stewardship](#), the [Montana Wildfire Risk Assessment](#) among others. A big thank you to everyone who is a part of this loosely organized but committed group!



**Mike West** – Thank you for all the community members who choose to be here this morning—Anna, Don, Mike and more. We exist because of you. This past week the Chief of the US Forest Service announced a strategy for [Confronting the Wildfire Crisis](#) . There has been increasing interest in fire and need for mitigation, and we should see funding directed this way. An example is the recent Joint Chiefs’ announcement where all four projects in Montana are being funded, including the *Connecting Fuels Treatments in the Salish Mountains and Whitefish Range* project focusing west and north of Kalispell (project description and map in the link [HERE](#)).

There has long been a need and desire to have a geospatial product that would capture past and current fuel treatments and to help coordinate long-term planning-- thank you to Rick Connell for taking this on (again) as part of the Fuels Focus Group being assembled to work on this. In addition to compiling fuels and project data and/or boundary layers, we’ll coordinate to tell the story of the work that has been ongoing and is expected to continue. We’ll work to elevate the existing platforms that are already in place and add new tools to increase public awareness of Home ignition Zones, ignition-resistance, preparedness and prevention, and active forest management.

We have a solid foundation here and let’s not forget that “slow is smooth and smooth is fast” or that “this is a marathon, not a sprint.” We are in this for the long haul and coordinating work up front will benefit us all in the end.

**Rick Connell** – There is an ask that we increase our 5-year vegetation management plan and an ask for every year beyond it. We are also beginning discussions on what it looks like to develop [PODs](#) (Potential Operational Delineations) and reduce fuels strategically across ownership.

**Deb Starling** – They currently have nine active agreements in place and are continuing to coordinate with Flathead NF project areas. They have two agreements that should be ready to close out this spring and have been reaching out in the Many Lakes and Foothill Road areas. They should find out about the Western States WUI proposal soon... There is a lot of interest coming from Whitefish Hills (located within the JC area) but it's not likely that the State and Private Forestry funding will be available as quickly as the federal funds will be so there may be a wait. Because of growing interest, they are looking to submit a proposal for the Blacktail area outside of Lakeside.

Also, All State insurance has identified Deb as a "lifeline", so she has been getting even more calls re: insurance. This is allowing an opportunity to engage with landowners and provide some much-needed education regarding the wildfire situation-- she is grateful that Ernie has been available to take some of the calls!

**Sean Johnson** – The Joint Chiefs' awards were announced last Friday but the federal government is still operating under a continuing resolution so funds will not be available until something has been signed.

Sean is working on getting a Local Working Group meeting scheduled for mid-March and will let us know when it has a spot on the calendar. They'd like to use it as a brainstorming session to help determine what and where the resource concerns exist. Also making another try at hiring another full-time position; they were not successful last year, likely because of cost-of-living increases.

**Lincoln Chute** – Is happy with the Flathead County Community Wildfire Protection Plan ([CWPP](#)) in its current form but has never been satisfied with the forest management section so will be taking another look at that. We should all be looking at our copy of the CWPP, reminding ourselves of the projects and priorities, making assignments and tracking priorities.

Has been working with the Parks Department and the new Director Christopher Maestas to move forward with work on the County Parks. They visited Many Lakes recently to look at opportunities to decrease the fuels on County Park lands.

**Ernie Nace** – Has been helping with the Basic and Advanced County Co-op training that occurs each winter. He sees this is a good time to start teaching and building good habits in new fire firefighters. Ernie and Rick Trembath have been working together on developing a pile burning workshop presentation in a couple formats: one as a 2-hour standalone indoor session, as the indoor portion of an indoor/outdoor session, or a webinar recording, and a second as a shorter narrated recording for posting in a library of resources.

He is part of the ongoing conversation about how to provide a better, more consistent home risk assessment across the DNRC field offices. He recently got his drone license so is becoming available to record and capture before and after conditions!

**Logan Sandman** – They are planning a Home Risk Assessment class for this spring— 1/2-day class, 1/2-day field – and working on developing the content. Also, there's a Mental Health Resiliency training to be hosted for all agency partners. Contact Logan or Dylan for more information.

**Allen Chrisman** – They are working out the dates for the North Fork interlocal but pencil February 9 for the winter meeting and July 13 for the summer interlocal, with the Firewise presentation/discussion in the morning. They are planning to host the basic wildland firefighter training again in June. Allen and Sean will work together to advertise the Wedge Canyon TIP well before the fall deadline. (*FireSafe Flathead is available to assist with any printing of postcards or community outreach if you are interested...*) They are also starting work to update their NF CWPP addendum.

**Ben Devall** – Has been working with Ernie Nace to get a complete Community Risk Assessment updated (last was in 2014) and renew Firewise status, and that's now complete. Risk assessment calculated out to moderate, and some are concerned that since it cannot be changed, people will become complacent. This led to discussion about slope, aspect, topography and the acceptance that sometimes we choose to live in places that will always have an elevated risk of fire.

Enormous amount of participation this year with the Mountain doing work, landowner packets sent out; they include Firewise, district info, in the event of wildfire info, and important numbers. 65% of homeowners are also signed up for the Big Mountain Community website ([www.bigmountaincommunity.com](http://www.bigmountaincommunity.com)) and this will allow them to push out emergency messages, share Firewise links and info. Also interested in the short-term rental conversation and handouts that are being worked on.

**Rick Trembath** – The Boulder 2700 Fire has generated a lot of interest this year. Working with Tony Harwood and the CSKT to capitalize on this interest. Working with Ernie on the pile burning presentations.

**Ali Ulwelling** - Don't forget, I have a lot of these here in my office so give a call if you'd like a stack:

[Be Ember Aware!](#)

[Wildfire Home Retrofit Guide](#) (home hardening)

[Wildfire Evacuation Checklist](#)

[Ready, Set, Go Montana](#)

[Fire-Resistant Landscaping Considerations for Montana's WUI](#)

[Protecting and Landscaping Homes in the Wildland Urban Interface](#)

Thanks for being here and we'll see you next month!

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