

03-15-2023 FireSafe Flathead Meeting Notes

Facilitator & Notes: Mike West

Participants: Lincoln Chute, Ben Devall, Ernie Nace, Ali Ulwelling, Cary Johnson, Allen Chrisman, Toby Thompson, Randy Sudberg, Richard Hildner, Scott Countryman, Dillon Kopitzke.

Dillon Kopitzke inquired about the Interagency Fuel Treatment Decision Support System (IFTDSS), and we briefly discussed the programs fire behavior, risk assessment modeling capabilities, intent and how the forest service uses the program to plan our fuel reduction projects. Mike West offered to share the link with the group since there is a "Public Partners" log in available if others in our group would like to use the program. https://iftdss.firenet.gov/landing_page/

Discussed and previewed the Arc GIS Online mapping platform Ali has been working on with their MT DNRC GIS department. We discussed how these GIS products are helpful for planning cross-boundary projects, information sharing, grant funding requests etc. There can be some inconsistencies with the map product depending on where the data is sourced from because some of the sources are continually updated, and some are not. These products are great planning tools however should also be combined with on the ground knowledge because it's not going to pick up quite a bit of fuel reduction work occurring on private lands or when spatial reporting is not available to the public.

- Would like to know if this will be public facing so anyone can access it or if we will need to be granted access?
- When do you think this product will be available?
- Will it include specific info regarding forest insect and disease activity? (I mentioned the forest service does annual insect and disease mapping so a data source may exist)

Previewed the Elmo 2 fire video.

- A few folks would like the video to be available before our spring/summer events. Specifically Many Lake, North Fork, Big Mountain etc.

Richard Hindler inquired about the Char Boss and other bio char making apparatus. We had a general discussion on how the Char Boss is new technology and the scale at which it could operate effectively. Reminded folks about the additional Bio Char demo occurring at Ty Foleys property north of Whitefish tomorrow.

- Paul Donnellon... information for portable bio char kiln. Hungry Horse/Glacier View Ranger Station 406-387-3807.

Montana West Economic Development is still a possibility to host what was the Northwest Montana Hazardous Fuels Program, so we have another avenue to provide grant funding through the State of Montana DNRC to private landowners in Flathead County. We are hoping to know by the end of this month and be able to share the decision at our April meeting. It was noted that this program is also a great communication/educational tool for the public in Flathead County.

North Fork update.

- The North Fork community is on track for their two planned events June 22nd and July 12th.

- At the first meeting they are planning to look at an example property to facilitate a discussion about the home ignition zone, fuels mitigation, in-side the home safety etc.
- Their second meeting is their firewise day which occurs the same day as the Interlocal meeting. It's the 20th anniversary of the Wedge Canyon fire so they are going have presentations with firefighters and homeowners who experienced the fire firsthand.
- They would like to be able to show the Elmo 2 fire video at both events so hopefully it's available by then.
- Scott Countryman inquired if he could film the home ignition zone discussion to be able to use it as future training/education June 22nd. Allen Chrisman and Richard Hindler are going to discuss and get back to Scott if filming is an option or not.

Scott Countryman update.

- He wanted to let folks know there is insurance available which will provide wildland fire engines in the event of a fire threatening homes which also can bring down the cost of insurance. California is losing companies willing to insure homes in the wildland urban interface and cost are going up for homeowners there. Insurance that can provide fire engines used to be for expensive homes however now is being used by individuals with lesser expensive homes.
- Scott would like to move forward with home ignition zone/home construction training for home inspectors. Lincoln Chute and Ernie Nace volunteered to help Scott with this training sometime in May. Scott is going to secure a venue, lock in a date and work on invitations.

Flathead County update.

- Lincoln would also like to produce a before, during and after youtube video on how to address the home ignition zone. If anyone knows and landowners willing to participate, he will provide the labor, videographer etc.
- Working with the parks department and getting traction for doing the needed fuels mitigation work on multiple county parks in the Many Lakes area.
- Lincoln is advocating for proposed subdivisions to do fuels mitigation on entire larger parcel before it is allowed to go to final plat. Also working on water sources and safety areas for subdivisions.
- Working on an online burn permit system that will hopefully come online by May 1st. Public health is working on a grant to pay for the associated fees. This system should allow for more flexibility for burning during the winter months when dispersion is forecast to be good. It should also allow fire managers to turn the system off during periods of high fire danger. CSKT wrapping the remainder of Lake County into their burn permit system.
- Resource Advisory Committee is postponed due to a snafu with the federal registry requirement, so they are still taking project funding proposals. Meeting date is still TBD.
- Wildland Firefighter Foundation banquet is April 15th at the Flathead County Fairgrounds. Great community support last year with funding raised going to support injured firefighters and or their families. BBQ dinner with lots of great donations to auction off, raffle drawings etc. It's open to anyone and a great family friendly event.
- Will be doing wildland fire refresher training for Sheriffs/deputies including evacuation preplanning.

- Flathead County has upgraded subscription for notifying public about emergencies like wildfire, floods etc. Also looking at better notification system options.
- Big Mountain Fire is planning a firewise event for the third week of July and will let the group know when they settle on a date.

Big Mountain Fire update.

- Did have a recent firewise meeting and added three new members to their firewise board.
- Whitefish Mountain Resort has a new risk manager who is interested in wildland fire and researching wildfire threats to ski resort infrastructure. Also planning to go over WFMR wildland fire plan to update with new employees.
- Would like to focus on additional fuel reduction projects downslope from Big Mountain and where powerlines the road. Planning to bring a group together to coordinate outreach and engage with the power company to mitigate wildfire threat to power infrastructure.
- Reiterated alternate egress road through Haskill Basin isn't a viable option due to heavy fuel loading, topography, and road system.
- Big Mountain fire has an incident action plan to address wildfire risk and associated actions.