



## FireSafe Flathead Meeting Notes, May 27, 2021

Next meeting: Thursday, June 24th, 2021 9-11am. Stay tuned for updates on whether we meet via Zoom, in person, or both!

**Attendance:** Mike West (Fuels AFMO, Tally Lake Rd of the Flathead NF), Deb Starling (NW MT Hazardous Fuels program), Karli Becher and Kiara (District Conservationist, NRCS), Lincoln Chute (Flathead County Fire Services Area Manager), Ali Ulwelling (Forestry Assistance, DNRC), Rick Trembath (all around fire & forestry guy), Ben Devall (Chief of Big Mountain Fire Department), Paul Okerberg (Highland Meadows HOA and Firewise Community), Jan Cronin (Community member & advocate for firefighter & community safety), Logan Sandman (FMO of Libby Unit DNRC), Hailey Graf (Flathead Conservation District, Resource Conservationist), Mike Kopitzke (Lake 5 & DNRC FMO retired).

*"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*

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### 0900 – Welcome & Introductions

Agency & Organization updates:

**Flathead National Forest**, Mike West - Mike provided a thorough overview of what drives fire season outlooks by walking us through the Northern Rockies Coordination Center (NRCC) products recently released. Check it out on the [NRCC website](#) or directly to the link:

[https://gacc.nifc.gov/nrcc/predictive/outlooks/Monthly Seasonal Outlook.pdf](https://gacc.nifc.gov/nrcc/predictive/outlooks/Monthly_Seasonal_Outlook.pdf)

The cumulative cross-boundary work at Oettiker Creek Ranch (Tally Lake RD near Logan Creek) and Big Mountain/Whitefish/Haskill was highlighted at a Fire Adapted Montana Learning Network tour hosted after our last meeting the end of April. It was a fine opportunity to gather, walk through projects, and discuss future opportunities. Mike emphasized the benefits of these in-person, on the ground conversations and noted that next time we should consider inviting even more to attend.

The Joint Chief's proposal has been submitted and Mike will let us know what happens next! Tally Lake RD is starting work in the Good Creek area that will likely lead to additional interest from neighboring landowners.

Chris Dowling, District Ranger Swan District provided notes re: their increase in prevention messaging as they are anticipating another season of increased recreationists across the forest— every day is like July 4<sup>th</sup>!

**Ben Devall, Chief of Big Mountain FD** – The Big Mountain Firewise group is reinvigorated and is putting together wildfire info packets to hand out to new homeowners, they are working with HOAs to update defensible space to be in line with national standards. **June 9** – Hosting a scenario to test their fire response plan and **June 25** – Hosting a brush cleanup day! **\*Ali get HANDOUTS for Ben\***

**Natural Resources & Conservation Service (NRCS)**, Karli Becher – There is a lot of interest and they are pleased to announce that they can start accepting applications for the Little Bitterroot and Wedge Canyon (North Fork) areas for work to be implemented in either 2022 or 2023. More to come!

**NW Montana Hazardous Fuels Program**, Deb Starling – There continues to be a lot of interest all around. They will likely be working in Highland Meadows (new Firewise community) and Little Bitterroot (in coordination with NRCS) soon and are currently engaged in Haskill Creek, Notta Road (Farm to Market), Overlook 2 (Foy's canyon area), Stone Mountain, Ptarmigan Village (Big Mountain Rd), and are 100% spend out in the Many

Lakes area with more interest coming from Many Lakes and Foothill Road. Also, a LOT of calls coming from Lakeside (not eligible for Haz Fuels funding) and some interest in Kuzmic Lane (Coram) but need more to draft a proposal. Deb and Ernie are working in tandem to coordinate calls, responses, and home risk assessments!

**Flathead County Fire Warden, Lincoln Chute** – CWPP is signed and hosted on the Flathead County website! They just met with the Sheriff's, OES, DNRC to cover evacuation operations. Biggest recommendation is not a community evacuation plan, but individual and family evacuation planning that is flexible and reflects the understanding of dynamic situations. **\*We need to take the evacuation planning guidelines from the CWPP and create a one-page handout to add to landowner packets and to host on the website\***

**\*ACTION: Lincoln & Ali need to coordinate agenda and meeting date/time with Monica\***

All staffed up and ready to go. Juanita Nelson is working on the pre-disaster mitigation plan that would, incidentally, make Flathead County eligible for FEMA's [Pre-Disaster Mitigation](#) grants.

**Anna Lang, National FEMA board** – Also interested in exploring the possibility of using the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities ([BRIC](#)) funding, which has doubled under the current administration, once the Plan is complete. FEMA is moving to decentralize and will have FIT (FEMA Integration Teams) with local members being able to provide better coordination. Anna will talk further with her friend in the NFPA to better connect Firewise communities with insurance. Both Ben and Paul agree that insurance is KEY to this.

**\*Action – connect with Anna!\***

**Ernie Nace, Community Preparedness Specialist** for Kalispell Unit DNRC – Working closer with Deb to coordinate home risk assessments and engaging with landowners who are near spring fire locations for the same. Busy with admin of burn permits through June and seasonal training.

**Jane Mandala, Montana Tree Farm Peer Network Coordinator** – Thank you, Jane, for presenting on the Montana Tree Farm Peer Network! See attachment for more on her program.

**Following up on ACTION ITEMS from last meeting:**

- ✓ Action: Ali and Ernie will follow up on getting Fire Info signs to Mountain Brook on Foothill Road
- ✓ Action: Ernie and Ali will coordinate schedules to record video of home assessment
- ✓ Ali is working with Julia on the Fire Adapted Montana publication with inserts for local programs
- ✓ Working on videos and website!

**Many Lakes HOA, Randy Sundberg** – That 3<sup>rd</sup> exit that they had been talking about on Kaufman Lane is not going to happen. Rather than host the annual fire event/conversation, he's looking to coordinate with agency reps & responders (Creston Chief Mahugh, Jeremy Pris, Lincoln Chute, Sheriff's Department) to come up with an evacuation plan. Randy will make the contacts and invite to discussion.

**Action: Randy will contact all and schedule a time to meet up at Many Lakes**

**Upcoming Dates and Events:**

- **FireSafe Marin Webinar Series** [HERE](#) and Living with Fire publication [HERE](#)
- **North Fork Fire Wise Events:**
  - June 24, 9:30am at Sonderson Community Hall – Basic wildland fire training with Gary Mahugh and others.
  - July 14, 9:30 am at Sonderson – FireWise (morning) / Interlocal (afternoon) presentations. Todd Lando from Marin County, CA may be there to present on the Paradise Fire, if not they will be showing the Big Burn and hosting discussion afterwards.

- **KGEZ Forestry Plus Series!** Tune in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday at 7:20am! Rick Trembath on Fire History [HERE](#)
- **The Smoke Column in the Flathead Beacon** – We are always looking for topics & writers!
- **Land Stewardship Seminar Series** – recordings on Forest Pests and Disease, Preparing for Wildfire, and more can be found [HERE](#).

11:00 meeting adjourn

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