

National Forest Advisory Board Meeting

June 24, 2020

Virtual Via Adobe Connect

NFAB Members:

Chairman Danielle Wiebers, Vice Chairman Dick Terry, David Wolff, David Miller, Dick Brown, Lloyd La Croix, Michael Gollither, Ben Wudtke, Tony Ortiz, Greg Josten, Lauris Tysdal, Patty Brown, Alan Johnson, Alice Allen, and John Gomez, Dave Hague, Paul Pierson, Corissa Busse, Mary Zimmerman, Wayne Garman, Dennis Yellow Thunder, Bob Burns, Rachel Day, Kevin Robling, Travis Bies, Jennifer Hart, Keith Haiar, Richard Hanson, Ben Rhodd, Jessica Crowder, David Johnson

Black Hills National Forest Leadership Team:

Jerry Krueger, Acting Forest Supervisor; Rob Hoelscher, Acting Deputy Forest Supervisor; Ralph Adam, Physical Resources Staff Officer; Todd Butler, Customer Services Staff Officer; Jon Word, Natural Resources Staff Officer; Jason Virtue, Fire, Fuels, Aviation, Safety Staff Officer; Tracy Anderson, Hell Canyon District Ranger; Steve Kozel; Northern Hills District Ranger; Mike Gosse, Bearlodge District Ranger; Jim Gubbels, Mystic District Ranger; Scott Jacobson, Public Affairs Officer; Twila Morris, Executive Assistant.

Congressional Staff:

Mark Haugen (Thune – R, South Dakota); Katie Murray (Johnson – R, South Dakota) Jim Selchert (Rounds – R, South Dakota); Deanna Kay (Enzi – R, Wyoming), Jordon Fischer (Congresswoman Cheney – R, Wyoming); Nolan Rap (Barrasso – R, Wyoming).

Introduction & Welcome – Jerry Krueger:

Jerry Krueger: Good afternoon and welcome to the June National Forest Advisory Board Meeting. This is a very important meeting, and I want to welcome everyone who is attending today.

Welcome Rob Hoelscher from the Bridger Teton National Forest; Rob is our Acting Deputy Forest Supervisor for the next 120 days. We really appreciate Rob and all of the expertise he brings to the Forest.

Approve the Minutes of the April 15, 2020 Meeting – Danielle Wiebers:

Wiebers: Welcome to all of the Board members, members of the public, and members of the media. Our first order of business is to approve the Minutes from the April NFAB Meeting. Rachel Day made a motion to approve; Alice Allen seconded the motion. April meeting minutes are approved.

Housekeeping – Jerry Krueger:

Krueger: Housekeeping is simple in the virtual world. Keep your phone muted unless you are talking and addressing the Chair. If you'd like to speak use the raise your hand icon or type your question in the chat box.

Comments to the Chair – Jerry Krueger:

Krueger: Danielle will be chairing our meeting, thanks to Tiesha Street for running the IT for our meeting, thanks to Scott Jacobson, Beth Doten, and Twila Morris.

Meeting Protocols – Danielle Wiebers:

Wiebers: Jerry covered the meeting protocols.

Approve agenda

Wiebers: Our next order of business is to approve the Agenda for today’s meeting. Rachel Day made a motion to approve; Dick Brown seconded the motion. Today’s agenda is approved as published.

Hot Topics

Legislative Updates – Federal

Wiebers: Next on the agenda are the Legislative Updates:

Jim Selchert, Office of Senator Rounds:

- The Governor did vote no on the Great American Outdoor Act.
- Most of the work we are doing is helping people get through the SBA Loan process, IRS recovery payments, IRS refunds, etc.

Mark Haugen, Office of Senator Thune:

- The Senate voted on the Justice Act, and it failed to get the required votes.
- The Senate confirmed another judge, now confirmed 200 lifetime appointments, and there are no vacancies for the first time in 40 years.
- The Senate is holding committee hearings on where the money has gone from the CARES Act.
- Farmers to Family Food Box Program; continuing to distribute millions of dollars’ worth of produce, dairy products, etc.
- Senator Thune will be at Mt. Rushmore on the 3rd and in the area for the weekend.

Paul Pierson: Mark, could you please talk about the Great American Outdoors Act.

Haugen: The Great American Outdoors Act passed; the Senator supported this. The Senator did have some concerns about making it mandatory, but overall that it was good. A lot of support from outdoors groups. A lot of people don’t like the Government buying land; but the land is generally used for municipalities; especially in rural areas.

Deanna Kay, Office of Senator Enzi:

- The Senator will be in Wyoming this weekend.

Katie Murray, Office of Representative Johnson:

- The House has passed a fourth COVID package, but the Senate hasn't taken it up yet.
- PPE flexibility; the Senate is taking more time to look at what is working and what is not working.
- Police reform; the House will be taking up another reform bill; the George Floyd Act.
- Ag Issues: Senator Thune and Dusty led a letter to USDA to provide relief to the farmers.
- Another effort that Dusty is in support of is for small meat packing plants, working to make the requirements a little more flexible so that the small local plants can produce more right now when we need it.
- Dusty will be here for the July 3rd event.

Jordan Fischer – Office of Representative Cheney:

- Nothing to report.

Legislative Updates – State

Jennifer Hart, State of Wyoming:

- Nothing new to report; still in a holding pattern and waiting to see how the budgets shake out.

Forest Service Hot Topics – DFO Jerry Krueger

Forest Operations relating to COVID-19:

Krueger: Continuing to implement a wide range of measures; those recommended by the CDC and our State health officials, to guard against the COVID-19 and help flatten the curve. As an Agency, we continue to limit our travel; only emergency travel is authorized. Our folks are out in the field conducting field work. We continue to encourage employees to telework; and our front doors are still locked. Most of our meetings are virtual. We are providing as much PPE to employees as possible.

- Concessionaire run facilities; those permit holders have operation plans in place that include safety measures for COVID-19.

Alice Allen: What kind of use you are seeing in campgrounds?

Krueger: We are seeing a lot of use. People want to get out and take advantage of recreation activities. We have seen a tremendous surge in recreation use on the National Forest.

Krueger: Motorized trail system Rangers are seeing a lot of use especially in the Nemo area.

Cook Lake Recreation Area:

Krueger: Cook Lake is a popular recreation area; right now we are waiting for the Bureau of Reclamation to complete the work on the spillway that they began last year. There is danger around the spillway, so we have that blocked off. The facility is open for day use only. Work

should be finished by July. Wyoming Game and Fish has stocked Cook Lake; and there is a lot of day use going on. My thanks to Mike Gosse and his Recreation Staff for working with the BOR and the County.

Fire Prevention Team:

Krueger: A Regional Fire Prevention Team has been working on Fire Wise and fire safety messages that we normally do around the 4th of July; general fire safety, the use of fireworks, etc. We are seeing a fairly significant up tic in abandoned campfires. Campfires are allowed only in a developed recreation site with a fire ring. Make sure that your fire is out before you leave.

Fire Conditions:

Krueger: Daren Clabo, our State Fire Meteorologist has been reporting on the moisture deficit. In fact, we have a fire going on today, so we want people to be aware of the fire danger and the moisture deficit across the Forest especially here in the Southern Hills. We have additional aviation assets on hand right now. As fire modules return from other assignments in the Region, we will keep them available through the 4th of July weekend. Shout out to Beth Doten and Scott Jacobs and the Rocky Mountain Region who are getting the message out about fire awareness.

Dennis Yellow Thunder: Did I hear you correctly when you said that fireworks are prohibited in the Black Hills National Forest?

Krueger: On National Forest System lands in the Black Hills, fireworks are prohibited.

Dennis Yellow Thunder: Mount Rushmore is Park Service so the Black Hills prohibition doesn't apply correct?

Krueger: I would refer you to the National Park Service for their policy.

NFAB Charter & Member Renewals:

Krueger: I'd like to give a shout out to Scott Jacobson; Scott has gotten our NFAB membership nomination package and renewal of our Charter all finished up and it is in the National Office, on its way to the Secretary of Agriculture for approval. Thanks to Scott; I want everyone to recognize how much work that really represented.

Deanna Kay: What is the time frame on when we'll hear back on approval?

Krueger: Both our Charter and membership expire the end of the year.

Regular Agenda

Orientation Topic: Forest Plan Revision vs. Forest Plan Amendment – Jerry Krueger

Krueger: Shout out to Lou Conroy; who has worked in several positions on the Black Hills; Lou would have been giving this presentation today, but he was not available, so I'll take it for Lou. This is important for Board members to understand because we rely so heavily on our Forest Plan to guide our Forest activities.

Below is a link to the Orientation Topic: Forest Plan Revision vs. Forest Plan Amendment presentation; double click on the link to view the presentation.

General Overview of Forest Plan Revision - Amendment

Patty Brown: What takes more precedents; having a revision or having an amendment?

Krueger: The answer is what is the need? Leadership has been thinking there is a larger need to revise the existing plan for three reasons; we have significantly changed conditions in a number of program areas; wildlife, changes in recreation program, travel management, wildland fire, MPB, we really think the driving change in condition across the board would put us in a position where we would want to revise the entire plan.

An amendment would be targeted. For example; would we do an amendment that addresses the changed condition about recreation on the landscape?

Patty Brown: On the last slide, you show that the National Forest Management Act requires a plan revision every 15 years. On a neighboring Forest, they've said it can be 15 to 25 years.

Krueger: Fifteen years is written into law and as an Agency we have fallen short of the mark. As we have revised plans, it has taken more time and the documents have gotten longer; the scrutiny around individual elements of the Forest Plan, the rigor has gone up. I failed to mention that whether or not we revise or amend the Forest Plan is not our decision, or the Regional Forester's decision. The decision, because it involves Agency funding, is made in the Washington Office. We will take a recommendation from the Working Group this afternoon. We've discussed this locally and regionally, but the decision lies outside our control.

Mount Rushmore Fireworks Update – Jerry Krueger

Krueger: We continue to move out on a plan for the National Forest lands in support of the State of South Dakota and the National Park Service in providing this recreation activity on July 3. The NPS IMT is here and on site. We have been working with the Park Service and understating their plan. We have equally been working diligently on how we'll support the public and protect the public land. We will have a large contingent of employees on the Iron Mountain road, around Horse Thief Lake, and other areas near the Monument. We have an IMT, and we are ready. Our purpose is three fold; safety, visitor management – helping people with their needs, and resource protection. Jason Virtue and our Wildland Fire folks have been integral to our IMT and we'll have modules out on the landscape.

Timber Sustainability Working Group Recommendation – Greg Josten

Krueger: Greg is our South Dakota State Forester; Greg and his group do a great job. They are a strong partner of the Black Hills National Forest. Thanks to Greg for leading this Working Group. Jon Word and Jeff Underhill are doing a great job supporting the Working Group.

There is additional work that the Working Group will be involved with up through August when we get the final GTR. We will not have a recommendation today on the Forest Sustainability Task, but I believe the Working Group will have a recommendation on the Forest Plan Revision Task.

Greg Josten:

Below is a link to the Timber Sustainability Working Group presentation; double click on the link to view the presentation.

Black Hills National Forest
Advisory Board

Timber Sustainability Working Group
Update
NFAB meeting 06-24-2020

Wiebers: Scott Jacobson, please send this draft out to the NAFB to review and digest and be ready to discuss at the next meeting.

Mary Zimmerman: I'm concerned about your numbers for growth and mortality; I'm concerned about the long term sustained yield, not just the next five years. It seems like you are erring on the side of optimism that there won't be any more mortality. In one year we had 10% of the whole forest involved in fire (Jasper, etc.); that could happen again.

Josten: Mortality will change over time, over 20 – 30 years. The best way to analyze this is to

have varying rates of mortality over time, but our charge was to look at five years. We need to consider if the forest grossly over estimates what the mortality level will be, and then the forest puts on a lot more volume, and we deny the ability to harvest that volume, what would the consequences of that be? If we underestimate the productivity and curtail the harvesting, basically we threaten the forest products industry with shutting down even though the wood is there. It's my understanding that if there are significant reductions in harvest volume things will start to get shut down. Once we lose industry it doesn't come back. National Forests all across the west are struggling with getting industry back into the Forest so they can manage their timber. So we have to be careful about how we choose these figures.

Zimmerman: There are also consequences if you over cut; there will be no product and the mills *will* shut down. We have an ASQ now and there have been no adjustments made to it according to inventories, and the ASQ treated as a promise instead of a ceiling continues to deplete the inventory. Now you're talking about a lower number for mortality and the past track record doesn't show an ability to shut that down again if depletion continues. We are going into a Forest Plan Revision that will last four years; doesn't it seem like you're flirting with having industry out on a limb they are cutting? Why wouldn't we be looking at something broader; it doesn't seem like the term five years is congruent with the term sustainability.

Regarding structural stages and the Forest Plan, we're coming up to the end of that objective of the current Forest Plan; where would you go from there once you met the objectives? Related to that, why -in the context of this NFAB Working Group- would we be looking at lands outside the BHNF?

Josten: Structural stages is an issue we still need to address. Looking outside the BHNF was our charge from the Forest Service.

Bob Burns: I am a member of the Working Group. Over the next five years is what we are looking at. Growth is up because of all the thinning that has been done, and the moisture we've received the last few years. Mortality is down, so we want to come up with a number that won't impact industry too much; but certainly we'll have a reduced timber harvest than we have in the past.

Krueger: A long term look would be covered in the Forest Plan revision.

Paul Pierson: I am a member of the Working Group. The .26% mortality rate is not a number we pulled out of the air, it's 40 years of FIA data, outside of large MPB epidemic and jasper fire years; but it did cover fire and MPB epidemics. Also given the changed condition, we have a much more open and healthy Forest. It leads us to believe based on the scientific data that .26% may be high for a five year average.

The Working Group is not looking at making recommendations on other lands, we're just looking outside the suitable base acres, for opportunities to meet management goals outside the suitable lands. I appreciate that Mary always has survival of industry at the forefront of her comments.

Dick Brown: Congratulation to the Working Group on this draft document; looking forward to

the final product. Does the mortality figure include the industry harvest?

Josten: Mortality is just dead trees, it does not include removals.

Wiebers: Round robin: Rachel Day, David Wolff, Corissa Busse and Dennis Yellow Thunder; nothing to add, appreciate the Working Group's efforts.

Jennifer Hart: Is there any indication on the timeline from FIA on when they'll get back to you with answers?

Josten: Nothing back yet. Jeff and Jon are helping to try to get our questions answered.

Dick Terry: I am part of the Working Group. I'm in concurrence with the Working Group report. The .26% mortality was on the low side; looking at the other figures, it's pretty much in the middle; the mortality that was presented in the GTR was on the high side, and .003% is at the opposite end of the spectrum.

Alice Allen: Thank you to everyone on the Working Group. This charge and timeline was a challenge. Regarding the growth rate, over five years, will it really make that much of a difference? I encourage you to not spend a huge amount of time working on that because it is only for five years. I fully support your determination on a Forest Plan revision.

Wiebers & Josten: Please send your comments to Danielle; Danielle will consolidate the questions and comments and we'll discuss at the next meeting. **Comments are due by July 17.**

Zimmerman: In choosing a number for mortality, it would be possible to work with an average on the long term instead of imagining an optimistic next 5 years. Linked to that, in a lot of these places that are being harvested, we now have corridors with thickets of dog hair and unaddressed weeds. In 20 to 30 years these will be our next MPB epidemic and fire risk is already high there. My concern is for the well-being of the resource ecology and that we move into the future with a strong one. Long term sustainability is what we should put our sites on; my first concern is the resource, then comes industry. The Forest Service needs to be in charge here, they are the ones that need to be looking out for a wide variety of values on the resource.

Wiebers: Jerry, the five years; does that come from the fact that every five years they reevaluate and fine tune?

Krueger: We were looking at a time horizon that if we were to move out on Forest Plan revision and an opportunity to get to the next EA that would include treatment on the landscape.

Wiebers: Thank you Greg for summarizing all the meetings and discussion and seeing that you've discussed all the topics.

Burns: There are 35 categories in unsuitable lands; and we saw possibilities of harvesting in several areas; steep slopes, meadows, etc., so there are sources of timber in there, and they are hard to quantify; but not a lot in total. One area was in the suitable lands that needs pre-commercial thinning. 200,000 areas need to be thinned and these stands are increasing every year. The problem is funding for that; because the funding comes from timber sales; and when

timber sales decrease the funding will decrease.

Pierson: Pre-commercial thinning has been a topic in our Working Group. It is a major issue on this Forest going forward. It warrants discussion and we need to find solutions. There's appropriated funds also that goes down to the Forest for pre-commercial thinning; there are opportunities for stewardship, etc. Timber sales are an added benefit of getting those acres done. As harvest is reduced funding for pre-commercial thinning will also be reduced. Thanks to the Working Group; a lot of in depth conversations, lots of different views; this Group is doing a good job of working together and respecting each other and letting the numbers speak for themselves. Once you look out beyond five years; you're looking at a plan revision. The short term windows is the short term. The ecosystem is exactly what the industry is concerned about; the sustained yield is what we're striving for; when you look at all lands there is potential there for a higher number than the 181 ASQ.

Josten: Thanks the folk's on the Working Group for their efforts. The solution is bigger than the thought process of one person, it's a group think. I appreciate the time the Working Group has put in.

August Field Trip – Jerry Krueger

Krueger: We are proceeding with planning the field trip as a normal pre-COVID field trip; we'll make some adjustments for COVID-19 best management practices. The field trip this year will be on the Mystic Ranger District, Jim Gubbels and his staff will be hosting. We want to highlight issues, both information and otherwise that the Board is struggling with; from what an FIA plot looks like, to taking a look at possible gold mining, what does a drill pad look like; what are the folks doing out there, and how. A wide range of projects and review that will include taking a look at a BHRL stand, take a look at the Alvin Restoration Project; it will be informative and exciting. We are trying to highlight the issues that are in front of the Board that they are asking questions about.

Jacobson: We do not have a meeting in July so pay attention to your e-mails and we'll be sending you additional information and the itinerary. **The field trip will be on August 19.** As in past years, we'll probably meet at 8:00 a.m. and have a full day. The Job Corps Culinary Arts Program always does an awesome job of supporting us; so I'll need to get a head count of attendees so we know how much food to make.

Burns: For planning purposes, you might consider having people drive on their own so they don't have to ride the bus.

Public Comments:

Jacobson: All public comments must be submitted via email to Scott Jacobson (scott.j.jacobson@usda.gov) no later than 4:30 PM on 25 June 2020. All comments submitted will become part of the meeting record and will be available via our notes/minutes that will accompany the recording of the meeting. **(No public comments were received).**

Wiebers: Thanks everyone for joining today, I do miss the face to face meetings, but we're looking forward to the field trip. Could I please have a motion to adjourn the meeting; motion made by Greg Josten, second by Mary Zimmerman.