

**Ravalli RAC**  
Meeting Notes  
February 22, 2023

**RRAC Attendees:** Deb Gale, Mary Williams, Julie Schram, William Moore, Drew Blankenbaker, John Ormiston, Michael Hoyt, Steve Schmidt, Mark Booth, Bruce Hunner, Jeff Burrows

**Absent:** Dalton Christopher, Mike Jeffords, Skyler Hoefer, Jeff Kaiser

**FS Attendees:** Abbie Jossie, DFO; Tod McKay, RRAC Coordinator; Jennifer Woirhaye, Notetaker

**Public attendees:** Various presenters as indicated below.

The Ravalli Resource Advisory Committee (RRAC) for the USDA FS Ravalli County was convened for its annual 2023 meeting at 9:00 A.M. on February 22nd, 2023 with both in person at the Bitterroot National Forest Supervisor's Office in Hamilton, Montana, and virtual attendees via TEAMS. The purpose of the meeting was to consider proposed projects for Title 2 funding recommendations.

**Quorum Assessment - RRAC members present:**

Deb Gale, Chair

Mary Williams, Vice Chair

Category A: Julie Schram, William Moore, Drew (Tyler) Blankenbaker; Not present- Dalton Christopher, Mike Jeffords, Skyler Hoefer

Category B: John Ormiston, Mary Williams, Deb Gale, Michael Hoyt, Steve Schmidt

Category C: Mark Booth, Bruce Hunner (both for full meeting), Jeff Burrows (for proposal voting portion of the meeting); Not present -Jeff Kaiser

**Call meeting to order:** Mary Williams made a motion to call the meeting to order at 9:06am, seconded by Julie Schram.

**Welcome & instructions for the meeting:** Deb Gale, Abbie Jossie

Discussed the projected funding available for allocation to recommended projects was appx. \$200k this fiscal year, with \$115k estimate in FY23 funds, and carryover of appx. \$85k from FY22 unallocated. There is over \$350k requested for projects, so the RRAC has a challenge to whittle down the list or partially fund some, while fully funding others, or no funding recommended for some.

**Round Robin Introductions:** RRAC Members

**Approval of 2022 RRAC Meeting Minutes:** John Ormiston made a motion to approve the June 8, 2022 meeting minutes, seconded by Mark Booth. Motion approved.

**Election of New Chair – Vice Chair:** John Ormiston made a motion to re-elect Deb Gale, Ravalli RAC Chair and Mary Williams, RRAC Vice Chair for the next year. Motion was seconded. Motion approved.

### **Presentation of 2022 Project Proposals:**

Each presenter was given 10-minute slots to present their project proposals for Title 2 funding from the Secure Rural Schools Act. They were advised they would have 6 minutes for presentation and 4 minutes for Q & A from the RRAC.

**Project 9: C. Ben White Memorial Trail-Latrine, Bitterroot Land Trust, Kyle Anderson**  
Montana FWP, the US Forest Service, and Bitter Root Land Trust have cooperated to construct a new trailhead and trail on C. Ben White Memorial FAS and adjacent lands of Bitterroot National Forest. In response to demonstrated need, and to promote the maintenance and environmental protection of the trailhead area, we now propose to install a single-unit vault toilet to service the new trail. The toilet would likely be located some distance from the trailhead parking area, to limit its use by passers-by who are not using the trail. To enable pump truck access to the toilet location, we also propose to install a vehicle gate. FWP will install the toilet and gate using their own staff and equipment (estimated \$3,000 of in-kind contribution to the project).

### **Project 10: Sula Day-Use Area – Phase 1, Bitterroot Land Trust, Kyle Anderson, and D/S Recreation Program**

In 2022, Bitterroot National Forest (BNF) acquired 12 acres of land along the East Fork Bitterroot River, in Sula, from Bitter Root Land Trust (BRLT). As a next step, the partners propose to develop a day use area that offers picnic tables, river access, and nature trails, including improved all-abilities trails. The completed site will enhance the public's ability to access BNF lands and the East Fork River, will provide a wayside opportunity to travelers on Hwy 93 and the Nez Perce National Historic Trail, and will relieve increasing pressure on other public recreational opportunities around Sula and the south valley.

The partners will cooperate through the steps of scoping, resource inventory, site design, NEPA analysis and EA preparation, permitting, and eventually implementation. As an active proponent of this BNF project, BRLT will coordinate funding and resources to ensure that the process moves forward without placing an additional strain on the BNF's resources and ongoing program of work.

### **Project 11: Mitigating Human-Bear Conflicts – Phase 2, Wind River Bear Institute/MT FWP, Jessica Reyes**

This project will obtain and install bear aware informational signs on picnic tables at front country campgrounds and priority day use areas in the BNF, assist the BNF with messaging to prepare for the upcoming mandatory food storage order and with continuing to assess signage and bear-resistant infrastructure, proper use and repair needs at front-country recreation sites and campgrounds. This project will also provide assistance with additional education and outreach

efforts conducted by the Wind River Bear Institute-Wind River Karelian Bear Dog Partners (WR).

**Project 4: SBFC St. Mary Peak Lookout Volunteer Stewardship Program, Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation, Krissy Ferriter/Ryan Ghelfi**

The 2023 SBFC St. Mary Peak Lookout Volunteer Stewardship Program will continue to provide annual opening and closing of the Lookout, annual trail maintenance, volunteer staffing, public education at the trailhead and Lookout facilities, trail maintenance, supplies and support for continued operation of the Lookout.

**Project 5: Bitterroot Inventory of St. Johns wort, Ravalli County Weed District, Kelliann Morris**

Invigorate and expand the Integrated Weed Management program on the Bitterroot Forest and cross-boundary priority areas using multiple integrated management tools (detection/surveys/mapping/prevention education) to combat the establishment of pioneering invasive St. Johnswort.

**Project 6: Ravalli County Weed District Youth Bio-Control Program, Ravalli County Weed District, Kelliann Morris**

Increase large-scale releases of biological control agents for invasive plants above certain levels and provide education about noxious weeds as well as native plants via our educational garden.

**Project 7: FSR 550 Gate, Bitterroot Cross Country Ski Club Jesse Crocker, and D/S Recreation Program**

Currently there is no gate to prevent wheeled motorized vehicles from using FS road 550 during the seasonal closure from 12/1-3/31. FS Rd 550 is groomed by the Bitterroot Cross Country Ski Club and wheeled motorized vehicles driving on groomed ski trails is a significant source of user conflicts and reduces the recreational value of this road. Wheeled motorized vehicles driving on the road during spring snow melt is causing road surface damage and increased erosion. A gate that can be closed at the beginning of the closure, placed just past the junction with FS Rd 550A would fix both these issues.

**Project 8: Avalanche Information and Education, W. Central MT Avalanche Foundation, Patrick Black**

Promote public safety and save lives by providing high-quality avalanche information and education for all backcountry user groups.

**Project 1: Bass Creek Culvert Replacement, Ravalli County Road and Bridge Dept., John Horat**

One larger culvert is proposed to replace two undersized steel culverts.

**Project 2: Fred Burr Creek Culvert Replacement, Ravalli County Road and Bridge Dept., John Horat**

One larger culvert is proposed to replace three (3) undersized culverts. A larger concrete culvert will be buried into the stream bed.

**Project 3: Rye Creek Road Surface Stabilization, Ravalli County Road and Bridge Dept., John Horat**

The project is to stabilize roadway surfaces. The County will prepare the road for application of magnesium chloride of 5.7 miles.

**Public Comments:** A Public Comment Period was provided at 1:30 pm. There were no members of the public that wished to comment during the meeting.

**Project Discussion – Instructions for Voting:** RAC members then discussed the 2023 project proposals and voting instructions were given for members on TEAMS, phone, or voting in-person.

#### **Discussion regarding Projects:**

RAC members had animated discussions prior to voting. An estimated \$200k is the project 2023 amount of funding. Discussion for road projects included disfavor if they did not make a significant improvement and were perceived as only maintenance from year to year, and a desire from several members to have more detail on the benefits of the projects.

Project 1- Bass Creek project was proposed to not be a priority by the county during the proposal. It was unclear if the project would directly or indirectly benefit fisheries. A Fisheries Biologist had not been consulted on the project as it was proposed. Abbie Jossie shared the FS engineers did not support the project as it was originally written. Also shared was feedback from FS Fisheries Biologist Mike Jakober that the project culvert replacements are definitely needed, and they'll be an improvement over the existing condition. However, they do not provide any dimension data, diameter, height and length of the existing culverts for their proposed replacement structures, nor do they provide any stream channel data and their application. They simply state that they will be replacing two smaller culverts with larger ones. The cover dimension and screen channel dimension data are necessary to assess the benefit of the project. Without it, it is difficult to provide an accurate assessment of success of the project (shared by DR Jossie)"

Project 3- Rye Creek, RAC members discussed this project and would like other options available with longer lasting effect, would like to see a more permanent or longer lasting solution instead of asking for the same funding every year.

Project 4- St Mary- Not many other options for funding other than RAC or Grants, heaviest used trail on the BNF. Historical lookout.

Proposed summer RAC field trip to Rye Creek, past projects, Ben White Memorial etc.

Project 8- WC Avalanche Center - discussion was asking where current avalanche danger updates are coming from. This proposal included areas outside Ravalli County such as the Lolo and the Nez-Clear NFs. The Chair reminded Mr. Black of that within the proposal and asked if the proposal could be altered for only Ravalli County; Mr. Black indicated this funding would allow them to do more on the Bitterroot. The RRAC had concerns with how the proposal appeared to fund multiple counties and felt the proposal would have to be altered to drop the other two areas. Questions were responded to by the applicant, as Mr. Black stayed on for the full meeting. He advised their funding from the FS is limited, and is currently shared between

several forests, but is insufficient to cover the needs of the Bitterroot/Ravalli County avalanche information. Funding would provide more information/processing for the need for the Bitterroot with more frequent assessment and updates vs the once a week that is currently done by the FS to a single area. The need is based on the ever-increased motorized and non-motorized use in the recreation areas. Some members felt the Bitterroot does not have the public safety need addressed currently for this. Funding is for 90 days.

Project 6- Ravalli Weed District Youth Bio-Control Program – was funded last year, this year is double due to greenhouse.

Project 10- Sula Day Use - concern about consulting costs. Archeological survey questions, FS does not have time to complete this so would need to be done by contractor. Discussion regarding funding recommendations can include recommendations for if additional funding becomes available. For instance, if the BRLT received other grant money for the Latrine at C Ben White TH, RRAC funds for C Ben White could then be moved over to this project instead. BRLT may hear in May whether they get other grant funds and would be amenable to forgoing RRAC funds for that project and move them to this one instead.

**End of discussion period.**

Category C member Jeff Burrows joined meeting via phone after discussion and prior to voting.

Voting rules overview, majority of members for each category of RRAC to approve funding. (Category A three of five, Category B three of five, Category C three of four).

**Voting**

Moved (Mike) to Discuss projects other than 1,2 and 3 because they had the most discussion, motion was seconded (Julie Schram). Voting for projects 4-11.

Motion by Julie Sharm to support #4, SBFC St. Mary's Peal Lookout Volunteer Stewardship Program, seconded by Mike. As proposed for \$14300. Funding was approved.

Motion to fund #7, FSR 550 Gate, seconded by Mike. Funding for the proposed \$5000. Funding was approved.

Motion to approve #9 C. Ben White Memorial Trailhead latrine project, motion was seconded. Funding for proposed \$23,935. Funding was approved.

Motion to fund #11, Mitigating Human-Bear Conflicts- Phase 2; seconded by John. Funding for the proposed \$7000. Funding was approved.

Motion to fund #5, Bitterroot Inventory of St. Johns Wort for minimum amount of \$41,000., motion was seconded. Discussion- Prior to voting on #5, Burrows expressed concerned about reaching funding limit prior to reaching back and discussing projects 1-3. Directed topic to Fred Burr Culvert replacement and Rye Creek Rd stabilization from impacts, dust, road surface to be from recreation not landowner use. Request was made to finish voting on project #5 being it

was motioned and seconded then to move on to the other projects. Funding was opposed by Category C; funding was not approved/ put on hold.

Project #3 Rye Creek Road Surface Stabilization, overview of prior discussion was given to Burrows, concerns were noted that it is a re-occurring project fund. Burrows stated there was not any other option than Magnesium Chloride other than paving the road surface. Public safety issue with wash boarding and dust. Concern from RAC with lack of data during proposal for water quality from dust, no fisheries input, and no answer as to if there were other chemicals that could be used caused hesitation for funding. Question was asked why Rye Creek is requested for Mag Chloride every year. Answer from Burrows was other roads are cost shared by residence vs Rye Creek being mostly recreation to public lands. Road is County for a couple miles before it turns to FS.

-Voting will be done roll call style - member by member for this project.

Votes- were as follows- Julie Schram- No, Bill Moore- Yes, Drew-No. there was a “no” majority in Category A, project will not move forward.

Proposal to put project on the list if more funding is received. Will act on other proposals then can come back to this project.

Project #1 Bass Creek Culvert- Burrows- would be lower on their project list, would forgo Bass Creek if Fred Burr could get funding. Would like to discuss Fred Burr first.

Project #2 – Fred Burr Creek Culvert Replacement - Motion to discuss Fred Burr, motion seconded. For the minimum amount of \$70,000. Discussion- was not substantiated that it is a fish habitat restoration, more of maintenance. Would like to see a bridge vs different culverts.

Fisheries information was not provided during proposal. Request to vote pending Biologist support statement regarding benefits to fisheries conditions. Or request the county comes back next year with a bridge proposal. Burrows stated cost of bridge would be significantly higher.

Motion to vote w/ caveat of Biologist written support/justification for benefit to fisheries.

Julie Schram-Yes at &70K, Bill Moore- Yes, Drew- Yes,

John- Yes, Steve- Yes, Mary- Yes, Deb- Yes, Mike- No, Mark Booth- Yes, Bruce- Yes, Jeff- Yes. Motion was approved.

Burrows/ County will reach out to Biologist for report/ statement. If project does not get Biologist support, then funds will go to the next project.

Project # 8: Motion to fund Avalanche proposal, motion was seconded for \$34,000. Motion did not pass, No’s were Bruce, Bill Moore, Jeff Burrows. Reasoning was project did not fit resource benefits as much as other projects that are proposed.

Project #10 - Motion to fund Sula Day Use area for \$26,000 and was seconded. Burrows requested more discussion. Vote had a no in Category C, would like to re-visit later if funding becomes available.

Project # 6 - Motion to fund project #6 Youth Weed Bio-Control Program for the minimum amount of \$45,900, motion was seconded. Discussion continued about funding amounts.

Burrows mentioned the funding of \$35,900 as the minimum is what he was told not the \$45,900.

Motion was amended and seconded to \$35,900. All members were in favor and recommendation for funding passed.

Discussion once again brought up regarding Rye Creek Rd by Burrows, re-iterated that issue was caused by recreation travel and that in the future more impact information will be provided for future proposals. RRAC members indicated they thought the additional information had been brought up in prior year meetings, including that the data was requested for future proposals when it was previously approved in 2021, but the information requested has not been provided yet. No motion to reconsider this project.

At this point the RRAC reviewed the status of recommendations and had \$44,000 available for recommendations.

Motion by Steve Schmidt to re-visit the inventory of St Johns wart at the minimum amount \$41,000, motion was seconded. Motion was approved for funding.

Motion to put remaining \$2865 into the Youth Bio-Control Program, bringing total for Project #6 to \$38,765.00, motion was seconded by Steve Schmidt.

Question was asked if the RAC wanted to prioritize the unfunded projects in case there were additional funds to come available or increase already approved amounts.

-Motion to add Sula Day use for funding, motion was seconded if additional funding was available making it the #1 project on that list. Request was approved.

-Motion to make the 2<sup>nd</sup> priority the Avalanche project, motion was seconded. Motion was approved.

\_Motion that in the event of additional funds it goes to increase the minimums on the previous voted on approved projects that were partially funded at their minimum and funding would be increase amounts proportionately. Motion was seconded. Motion was approved by all.

### **Project overview of votes for funding**

1-Bass Creek project was dropped by the county.

2- Fred Burr was funded at \$70,000 w/ the caveat that it passes Biologist support. May receive additional funds with proportional distribution.

3- Rye Creek did not pass

4- St Mary's Stewardship passed with full funding

5- Bitterroot Inventory St. John's Wort passed that the minimum funding for \$41,000 could get additional funds if additional funds become available and the proportionate amounts.

6- Ravalli County Weed District Youth biocontrol funded at \$38,765 and could receive additional funds if available.

7- Forest Service Rd 550 Gate funded in full at \$5000

8- Avalanche information and education priority #2 for new additional funding.

9- Ben White latrine funded at the full amount and if other funding is obtained that funding will slide down to project #10 the Sula Day Use area.

10- Sula Day Use area is the first priority if additional funding is available is funded at \$26,000. If for any reason project #9 does not need the money project #10 gets funded with that money. If any new additional funds arrive at FS, this project would be funded 1<sup>st</sup>, then to Project #8 - the Avalanche project minus the funds to make up the difference to the \$26,000 with the new fund.

11- Fully funded at \$7,000.

**Motion to adjourn meeting and motion was seconded at 4:29pm, meeting was adjourned.**

***Certification by DFO:***

*I certify that to the best of my knowledge and recollection, the foregoing minutes and attached table are accurate and complete. Deb Gale, Chair has also reviewed the minutes.*

*These minutes will be formally reviewed and approved by the RRAC at their next meeting, date TBD, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes at that meeting.*

*Abbie Jossie, Designated Federal Official, RRAC* 

*USDA FS Bitterroot National Forest, Darby-Sula District Ranger*

*Debra Gale*

*Deb Gale, Chair, RRAC*

5/16/2023

Attachment – 1

Attachment 1 Excel Spreadsheet

Table of Projects and Funding 2/22/2023