

Ravalli Resource Advisory Committee

Summary of Annual Meeting

June 8, 2022

The Ravalli Resource Advisory Committee (RRAC) for the USDA FS Ravalli County was convened for its annual 2022 meeting at 10:00 A.M. on June 8th, 2022 with both in person at the Bitterroot National Forest Supervisor's Office in Hamilton, Montana and with virtual attendees via TEAMS. The purpose of the meeting was to consider proposed projects for Title 2 funding recommendations.

RRAC members present:

Bruce Hunner, Mary Williams (Vice-Chair), Deb Gale (Chair), Dalton Christopherson, Michael Hoyt, Julie Schram, Drew Blakenbaker, Mark Booth, Bill Moore, John Ormiston, Jeff Kaiser

Absent: Mike Jeffords, Jeff Burrows, Skyler Hoefer, Steve Schmidt

USDA FS Staff present:

Abbie Jossie (DFO), Tod McKay (RRAC Coordinator), Morgan Lehr (Teams host)

Other present:

During project presentations the project proponents were present via TEAMS to discuss their projects. See specific notes below.

Call meeting to order: Julie Schram made a motion to call the meeting to order at 10:08am, seconded by Mark Booth. A Quorum is present.

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

Round Robin Introductions: RRAC Members

Approval of 2021 RRAC Meeting Minutes: John Ormiston made a motion to approve the February 16-18, 2021, 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 by Julie Schram. 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.

St. Mary Peak Lookout Volunteer Stewardship Program – Sally Ferguson, from the Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation, presenter: The goal of the 2022 program is to provide volunteer staffing,

training, education, maintenance, and support for the historic St. Mary Peak Lookout. This is the busiest trailhead on the forest and hundreds of visitors arrive each weekend. Program began in 2011, at the request of the BNF. Program supports the annual opening and closing of the Lookout, volunteer staffing, public education at the trailhead and Lookout facilities, trail maintenance, supplies, and continued operation of the lookout. Packing support is provided annually by the Back Country Horsemen. Program also provides one 14-week Wilderness Ranger Fellow to serve as liaison between SBFC and BNF. All lookouts receive fire spotting and reporting training from BNF fire managers. Volunteers greet/educate approx. 1,500 Lookout visitors annually. In 2021, SBFC created an Ambassador Trailhead Program to educate visitors on safety, LNT, wilderness, and Lookout history. On weekends in July and August, six SBFC Ambassadors will greet hikers at the popular trailhead.

Forest Road 311 Decommissioning – Mike Jakober, USDA FS BNF Fisheries Biologist, presenter:

Objective of the project is to reduce sediment delivery to Rye Creek in the Darby RD, and two of its unnamed tributaries. Project is straight forward road decommissioning. Approx. 2 miles of Forest Road 311 between FR 5745 and FR 73191 would be recontoured. The road is poorly drained and is a chronic source of sediment to the creek. An excavator would be used to recontour the road back to its natural slope. Areas of soil disturbance would be seeded. Slash and sod mats would be scattered across the recontoured prism to help naturalize the site and reduce short-term erosion. NEPA is done. ESA is done. This is part of the 2018 Darby Lumber Lands – phase 2 project.

Camas Creek Culvert Replacement – John Horat, Ravalli County Road Department: This project would replace two failing 5-foot metal culverts with one larger buried concrete culvert. The project is located on Camas Road at Camas Creek. Work is proposed to start in Sept. 2022 and take approx. three months to complete. Ravalli County will provide labor for the project along with some materials and supplies.

Rye Creek Road Surface Stabilization – John Horat, Ravalli County Road Department: There is a dust control problem on this road and using magnesium chloride stabilizes the surface to hold up through winter. It was applied to 3 miles of Rye Creek Road in 2021 with RAC money. The proximity to the creek and high usage for hunting is why this road is a priority for this application. This application normally last about one year but hoping another application (in 2022) will help it last longer, for several years. Cost of magnesium chloride has increased by 30% in the last year. County does all the labor and applications.

Rombo CG Road Re-Route – Tanya Neidhardt, USDA FS Bitterroot NF Recreation Staff: The project goal is to move a portion of the existing campground road away from the river and eroding riverbank to a safer location for the public and campground infrastructure. Rombo is a busy campground on the West Fork Ranger District. It is especially popular with fisherman. The CG is currently getting a new water system this fall along with a new host site, septic, and pumphouse. In 2018, spring high water from the Bitterroot River eroded a portion of the campground and washed one camp site away. In 2020, high water continued to erode the bank and moved closer to the main campground road. The project would move a portion of the existing road to the east away from the river and eroding bank. One campsite would also be moved. Topsoil and plants would be utilized to rehabilitate the old portion of the road. Planting and seeding labor would be provided by Trapper Creek Job Corps students. Project to be completed this fall.

Haley Chute Boat Ramp Repair – Tanya Neidhardt, USDA FS Bitterroot NF, Recreation Staff: This project involves repairing the existing Haley Chute boat ramp by replacing the lower section of concrete blocks. The ramp is located across from Trapper Creek Job Corps and is a very popular, high use fishing access site on the West Fork. The main goal is to repair the degrading boat launch ramp by carefully removing the lower 20 feet of the ramp. Once the cracked/broken cinder blocks are removed, new concrete blocks and gravel will be set in place. Objectives are to improve infrastructure at the ramp and decrease turbidity in the river. Partners include Bitterroot Trout Unlimited and Trapper Creek Job Corps. Work to take place during the fall when there is low water and little use at the site.

Ravalli County Weed District Youth Bio-Control Program – Sarah Holmes, Ravalli County Weed District

Started in 2005 and has employed local high school students. They learn communication skills and become role models in our community. The program has released 6.5 million bio control bugs across Western MT. Hope to increase the scope and effectiveness with the Forest with this project. Goal this year is to increase the number of local landowners involved in projects and working with the students. They are also partnering with the City of Hamilton on improving landscaping strips (native plants) along Fairgrounds Road and the City of Victor Parks Department. The students will be monitoring and inspecting, catching/releasing bio control agents, and hosting a fundraiser - community plant sale.

Bitterroot NF Rush Skeletonweed Treatment & Monitoring - Diane Bessler-Hackett USDA FS BRF & Kellianne Morris, Ravalli County Weed District

The goal of this proposal is to increase the level of success and effort in limiting Rush Skeltonweed in Ravalli County. Early detection and rapid response are key on the Forest and in this valley so that these new invaders don't get a foothold. The County and the Forest have worked together for 30 years. Both have the same desire when it comes to noxious weeds. Rush Skeltonweed is very invasive and has been found mostly in Idaho. 156 locations/sites have been mapped in the Frank Church Wilderness and upper Selway areas. All agencies/partners are working together to keep this weed from spreading from the Forest into Ravalli County and private lands. The funding will help expand this program and early detection/eradication efforts. Along with treating all sites, we must continue mapping/GPS efforts, expand education outreach, and share this information with County, State, Federal agencies.

Mitigating Bear-Human Conflicts on the Bitterroot NF - Jessica Reyes, Wind River Bear Institute

The goal of this project is to reduce bear access to human-associated foods available in the BNF and increase visitor awareness around the issues. The project will support placing bear aware informational signs on picnic tables and information boards, and outreach and education efforts at priority forest recreation sites and front country campgrounds. The program will continue bear-aware education and outreach from last year's RAC project which funded placement of 10 food storage lockers in high-use forest campgrounds and recreation areas. Partners include Montana FWP, and Defenders of Wildlife.

Public Comments: A Public Comment Period was provided at 1:10 pm. There were no members of the public that wished to comment during the meeting.

Project Discussion – Instructions for Voting: RAC members discussed the 2022 project proposals and voting instructions were given for members on TEAMS, phone, or voting in-person.

Discussion regarding Projects:

Michael Hoyt, RAC member: The decommissioning of FR 311 was presented to the public as part of the Darby Lumber Lands 2 Project. I have a problem with the fact that it appears that now the Forest Service is looking for RAC to complete that when the public was under the impression that it would be completed with DLL2 project funding.

Abbie Jossie, DFO: Typically we include a whole lot of things in the NEPA analysis that may or may not be funded. We will get some funds that are generated from the receipts of a timber sale to go into mitigation work or stewardship work. But it doesn't mean the entire project under NEPA analysis is completely funded at the time of the decision. I can take a closer look and see what the wording was as far as whether it was anticipated that the timber sale would pay for that.

Michael Hoyt, RAC member: The public assumes that the things listed and analyzed in the NEPA process for a project, that all those things are part of the project and that is my point here. The public can easily understand that these roads were going to be decommissioned as part of the project. Whereas now we're looking at funding from outside the project. That's my quandary here.

Mark Booth, RAC Member: I see the need for the Rye Creek Road stabilization but I also have some concerns. I would be a lot more comfortable if they had offered some more research of other treatments methods available and the potential for more landowner contributions. I think they said only one person was contributing. So, my caveat would be to approve it now, but request more information if they submit it again.

Following comments Michael Hoyt shared concerns about voting on all 9 projects at once (lumping) and requested separate votes on projects 2, 3, 4.

RRAC vote record for recommendations for funding:

Mary Williams made a motion to approve projects #1, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. Mark Booth seconded it. All members voted in favor.

Mark Booth made a motion to approve project #2. Mary Williams seconded it. A roll call vote occurred.

In Favor: *Drew Blakenbaker, John Ormiston, Mary Williams, Deb Gale, Mark Booth, Julie Schram, Bruce Hunner, Jeff Kaiser, Bill Moore.*

Against: *Dalton Christopherson, Michael Hoyt*

Motion Passed

Mary Williams made a motion to approve project #3. Bruce Hunner seconded it. A roll call vote occurred.

In Favor: *Drew Blakenbaker, John Ormiston, Mary Williams, Deb Gale, Mark Booth, Julie Schram, Bruce Hunner, Jeff Kaiser, Bill Moore, Dalton Christopherson.*

Against: *Michael Hoyt*

Motion Passed

(Julie Schram requested additional information/research from the County on the streams running along the side of Camas Road to make sure they don't undercut the new culvert).

Dalton Christopherson made a motion to approve project #4. John Ormiston seconded it. A roll call vote occurred.

In Favor: Dalton Christopherson, John Ormiston, Mary Williams, Deb Gale, Mark Booth, Jeff Kaiser.

Against: Julie Schram, Bill Moore, Drew Blakenbaker, Michael Hoyt, Bruce Hunner.

Motion Failed.

Following discussion, a second roll call vote occurred on Project #4. No votes were changed, and the motion failed.

Next Steps:

Deb, as chair will send the committee recommendations to Forest Supervisor, Matt Anderson. He will be sending out a letter to each of the project leads to announce that they have received the funding. Deb would also like to see our Ravalli RAC meeting happen earlier next year (Jan-Feb) with a call for proposals happening around November. We will also shoot to reschedule a field trip to look at RAC projects in 2023.

Public Comment Period: No public registered to provide comment.

Adjourn – Julie Schram made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Mark Booth, adjourned at 2:35pm.

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, February 22, 2023, 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

Deb Gale, Chair, RRAC

1/30/2023 aej

Attachment:

Table of Funds Recommended

2022 Ravalli RAC Proposed Projects					
Project Name		Group	Title II Requested	\$ Recommend for Approval	
1	Rush Skeletonweed in Bitterroot NF Wilderness	Diane Bessler-Hackett/Kelleann Morris	Bitterroot NF /Ravalli Co Weed	\$50,000.00	\$50,000.00
2	Forest Rd 311 Decommissioning	Michael Jakober and Rebecca Lloyd/406-821-3269 (Jakober) 406-830-0998 (Lloyd)	Bitterroot NF/FWP	\$12,000.00	\$12,000.00
3	Rombo CG Road Re-Route	Tanya Neidhardt/821-1215	WF RD/Bitterroot NF	\$30,000.00	\$30,000.00
4	Mitigating Bear-Human Conflicts on the Bitterroot NF	Jessica Reyes, Program Biologist,	Wind River Bear Institute in partnership with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Region 2/Defenders of WL and USFS	\$7,000.00	\$7,000.00
5	Ravalli County Weed District Youth Bio-Control Program	Kelleann Morris/777-5842	Ravalli County Weed District	\$21,375.00	\$21,375.00
6	Haley Chute Boat Ramp Repair	Tanya Neidhardt/821-1215	D-S RD/BNF and Trout Unltd	\$4,000.00	\$4,000.00
7	Rye Creek Road Surface Stabilization	John Horat/363-2733	Ravalli County Road & Bridge Department	\$21,000.00	\$0.00
8	SBFC St. Mary Peak Lookout Volunteer Stewardship Program	Sally Ferguson/208-871-1906	Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation	\$10,890.00	\$10,890.00
9	Camas Creek Culvert Replacement	John Horat/363-2733	Ravalli County Road & Bridge Department	\$30,000.00	\$30,000.00
			Total Requested	\$165,265.00	\$165,265.00
			Total Available	\$250,818.00	\$85,553.00
				Balance Carry-over FY23	\$85,553.00