

BLACK HILLS NATIONAL FOREST NATIONAL FOREST ADVISORY BOARD SUMMARY OF MEETING

May 15, 2024

The Black Hills National Forest (BKNF) National Forest Advisory Board was convened at 1:00 P.M. on May 15, 2024, at the Mystic Ranger District, Rapid City, South Dakota. Shawn Cochran, BKNF Forest Supervisor, Designated Federal Officer (DFO) presided.

In accordance with the provisions of Public Law 92-463, the meeting was open to the public from 1:00 P.M. to 4:30 P.M.

Board members present:

Sarah Anderson
Michael Gollhofer
Rachel Nelson

Dick Terry
Alan Johnson
Paul Pierson

Jim Scull
Scott Kenner
Scott Guffey

For the record, it is noted that to avoid a conflict of interest, Board members absent themselves from the discussion and vote when the Board discusses applications from their respective institutions or in which a conflict of interest may occur. Members are asked to sign a statement to this effect. This does not apply to "en bloc" actions.

Staff of the Black Hills NF present:

Shawn Cochran, Forest Supervisor *
Toni Strauss, Deputy Forest Supervisor
Ralph Adam, Physical Resources Staff Officer
Jared Hohn, Assistant Fire Staff Officer
Matt Daily, Natural Resources Staff Officer
Jim Gubbels, Mystic Ranger District Ranger
Steve Kozel, Northern Hills District Ranger
Patrick Champa, Bearlodge District Ranger

Ben Schumacher, Acting Hell Canyon District Ranger
Thawney Stottler, NEPA Planner, MYRD
Brittany Coupe, BKNF Engineer
Lou Conroy, Forest Plan Revision Lead
Beth Doten, Public Affairs Specialist
Krista Landreneau, Executive Assistant

* Designated Forest Officer (DFO)

** Committee Coordinator

Congressional Staff present:

Katie Neff (Representative Dusty Johnson – R, South Dakota)

Ally Garner (Senator Cynthia Lummis – R, Wyoming)

Others present for all, or a portion of the meeting:

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| Darren Clabo (SD Meteorologist) | Patty Brown (OHV) |
| Rob Powell (SD Wildland Fire-Chief Operating Officer) | Nancy Hilding (Prairie Audubon Society) |
| Ben Wudtke (BHFPA) | Sam Griner |
| Marcus Warnke (SD State Forester) | Mica Keralis |
| Amanda Morrison (SD State Forestry) | Ty Brown |
| Seth Tupper (SD Searchlight) | Jay Davis |
| Lee Strubinger (SDPB) | Jim & Alice Allen |
| Mary Hilding | Stephen Barrett |
| | Alex Masson |

Welcome; Review and Approve Agenda; Review/Certify Previous Meeting Summary; Housekeeping; Comments from the Chair; Meeting Protocols

Chairperson Rachel Nelson called the meeting to order at 1:02 p.m.

DFO, Shawn Cochran: No opening comments.

Chairperson Rachel Nelson expressed thanks to Paul Pierson and Dick Terry for all years and the work they have put into the Board; this is their last meeting as they have reached the end of their third term as Board Members.

Chairperson Rachel Nelson presented general housekeeping information and protocols.

Hot Topics

Legislative Updates – Federal

Katie Neff, Office of Rep Dusty Johnson.

- Mark Haugen is in DC this week.
- Passed the Foreign Intelligence Act.
 - Additional warrant requirements, etc.
- Passed Foreign Aid – Importance of projecting strong foreign policy.
 - Ukraine and Israeli assistance financial and weapons.
 - Restocks U.S. armaments that have been sent out.
- Public Lands Bills
 - Sponsoring four Bills including:
 - Leases for conservations.
 - Remove Mining restrictions in Montana.
 - Declassify grey wolf as endangered.
- Police week is being observed with several bills pertaining to Law Enforcement.
- Rep Dusty Johnson introduced the FOREST Act.
 - Provide NEPA exemptions for communications facilities if there is already infrastructure and heritage have already been conducted.
- Reauthorized the FAA.

- Farm Bill – House is ready to release their version and expect to work the mark-up next week.

Ally Garner, Office of Senator Lummis

- Sen Lummis co-signed Sen Barrasso’s bill requesting \$5M to research Chronic Wasting Disease.
- Sen Lummis co-signed Sen Barrasso’s bill on BKNF mandatory harvest levels (not less than 75% of Allowable Sale Quantity).
- Working to prevent Processing and Distribution Centers from being moved out of WY (movements currently paused).

Legislative Updates – State

No updates from State of South Dakota

Sarah Anderson, State of Wyoming:

- Counties have submitted requests for CAS regarding Old Growth Amendments.

Forest Service Hot Topics – DFO Shawn Cochran and Toni Strauss

DFO Shawn Cochran covered Hot Topics.

- Seasonal gates opened today.
- Pactola Co-Stewardship signing ceremony early June; definitive date once we know when the Under Secretary is available.
- Spoke with Kelly Norris regarding Sen Barrasso’s visit and coordinating visit in the North Sand EA project area.

REGULAR AGENDA

FIRE SEASON UPDATES (Dr. Darren Clabo, SD State Meteorologist; Jason Virtue, Fire Staff Officer, BKNF; Jay Wickham, SD Wildland Fire; Dick Terry, State of WY):
Wildfire Potential Briefing for summer of 2024 (Dr. Darren Clabo)

fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd1176328.pdf

- 50% wildfires in June, July, August, and September are caused by lightning.
- BKNF is sitting near normal – a little above in most areas and a little below in the southern hills.
 - Most of the Black Hills are a couple inches above normal for annual precipitation at this point.
 - Not expecting any drought conditions developing.
 - BKNF saw <50% snow water equivalent.
- All models and probabilities indicate well above normal temperatures and well below normal precipitation for the season.
 - Expect wildfire peak will shift from July to August.
 - Late summer into fall for increased fire potential.

Black Hills National Forest 2024 Season Preparedness (Jared Hohn)

https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd1176331.pdf

- Overview of 2023 statistics and 2024 resources from the Forest Service
- 2023 was incredibly wet causing a slow season and allowing resources to go out and support other fires nationally.
- In good position with available resources due to the WUI.
 - Cooperation with the state and local have made the difference is our responsiveness.
 - Fast response with four lookout towers and responsive local population
 - Biggest concern is US385 construction effectively “cutting” the Forest in half.

Rob Powell (Chief Operating Officer for SD Wildland Fire) in for Jay Wickham

- Our organization and cooperations should be example for the rest of the nation in reference to our effectiveness.
- Staffing is stepping up but always have openings.
- Two dozers and air program (Pierre, Hot Springs and Spearfish)
- Building UAV program with four drones (capable of doing ignitions to mitigate risk)
- Average six-seven hundred students in Training Program and manage all IQS for everyone other than federal employees.
- Building two new fire stations (Hot Springs and Rapid City).
- One full time and three seasonal employees in GPD.

Questions:

Jim Scull: Who handles the prairie fires like on BLM? SD will respond to some of the more remote locations; we interact with each other regularly and have an agreement to send out two dozers and fire fighters whenever requested (Fed, state, local, or private property)

Dick Terry, State of Wyoming

- NE part of WY has been far dryer than SD and have seen several fires already.
 - Sage fire over 1200 acres.
 - Timber fires over 200 acres.
- Received some precipitation recently but came in with snow and wind – a lot of damage that may create more fuels.
- Helitack with 2 seats avail to counties (no cost for first operational period).
- Dozer and 20-person hand crew (crook and Weston have their own dozers).
- Interagency cooperation is great in this area.

Questions:

Paul Pierson: Two questions related to the presentations. With the shoulder seasons, are they more human rather than climate caused? Seeing the agency focus on the wildfire crisis, would be interested in the outcomes related to various stages and management of the forest (how it impacts the severity, etc.)?

- Dick Terry: Some of the big ones are downed power lines caused by winds or human caused from burn piles getting away in those winds.
- Jared Hohn: Seasonality (pre-green up) requires many variables to align and usually needs strong sustained winds contributing to severity when coupled with dry fuels or prolonged drought and the ignition components.
- Rob Powell: In those shoulder seasons the grasses are cured and contribute greatly to the severity. The risk comes along in the WUI when everything lines up. The liability in the WUI makes organizing controlled burns difficult.
- Dick Terry: The worst-case scenario, fire can move through thinned stands. But unless it's stand replacing, it will recover.

Scott Kenner: Is that due to the heat that generates up that it becomes stand replacing?

- Dick Terry: Most likely

Jim Scull: Regarding the jack pine (doghair) – how is that being mitigated?

- Jared Hohn: The forest sets up service work through allocated budgets. The doghair is more resilient to burning (it would take a special event); they also outcompete the grass which is the primary fuel source.
 - Funding Priorities: Benefit for the public and the land - Protect WUI.

Paul Pierson: So we accomplish what we can with the allocated funding but sounds like we are still limited in what we can do; relying on funding is tough.

GAOA MITCHELL DAM PROJECT RECOMMENDATION:

The Board was provided an overview paper of the background of the proposed Mitchell Dam Project last week. Looking for a motion and then open for discussion.

Scott Kenner motioned to move forward with the recommendation. Seconded by Dick Terry. Opened for discussion.

Scott Kenner: Attended the Hill City Public Meeting and attended the workgroup in April. Authored the recommendation document to reflect the public comments and discussion. The recommendation is to accept option #2 to decommission the dam. This option best represented the principles of focus on socio-economic management and sustainability on the Forest.

Alan Johnson opposes the recommendation for option #2 – feels it would result in a net loss of recreation opportunities. Feels it gives a different opportunity than another trout stream.

Scott Kenner clarified that only \$2.5M has been identified/allocated, not the \$35-40M required to reconstruct the dam. Without that extra funding, the lives and property downstream are at risk.

Jim Scull agrees with Alan Johnson stating that \$35M is chump change for the Federal government. The state installed a different dam and fishery and is maintaining it nearby.

Chairperson Rachel Nelson called a vote. All Board members with the exception of Alan Johnson and Jim Scull voted in favor. Motion carried.

FOREST PLAN REVISION UPDATE (Lou Conroy, Forest Plan Revision Lead, BKNF)

MPSG is working on the Planning Stage. Initial IDT meeting occurred recently, and small groups have meet. The development of the “Statements of Need” are getting underway. Working group meetings with our cooperators are being scheduled. New guidance for NEPA (EIS and EA timelines and page limits) was released on May 1st, effective July 1st. We are awaiting the details of how this will affect the NEPA timeline. We expect to put out the NOI this fall and want everything prepared and more clarity and guidance before starting the “clock”.

External Engagement Strategy Recommendation.

- Sarah Anderson and Scott Kenner sent comments to the draft engagement strategy sent out in March. Monitoring Plan methodology will go on during process – public will have opportunity to comment at this point. Much will happen simultaneously.
- Cooperators have provided comments and stakeholder lists will undergo continuous updating.
- We intend to engage as much of the public as possible throughout the phases.

Jim Scull: How long does this usually take to implement? We can start implement within 30 days after signing the EIS.

Alan Johnson: Black Hills Badlands should be included as stakeholder. There was a new term used: “Environmental Justice” – what are you referring to? Ensuring we are reaching out and engaging with all facets (low income and marginalized) – we will include definitions.

Dick Terry: With the extensive effort on the LiDAR project, before you develop the plan, will you receive the final efforts and data? DFO Shawn Cochran – It will definitely be incorporated. FS Chief was briefed on the story map and will be briefing the Secretary’s Office. Analysis will be broken down and released into two phases – first in the fall, second sometime in 2025.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No members of the public submitted requests to make public comments.

Sarah Anderson questioned where we were in the process for the Board member applications. Toni Strauss: All the application packages were sent to the Washington Office and they are still going through the applications. Provided the packages are approved by then, we will be meeting in July and will also have an August field trip if there is interest.

Paul Pierson: Is the “every other month” meeting date set in stone? When was it voted on? Chairperson Rachel Nelson: It was decided by the DFO in December (NFAB Charter, paragraph 8); it does not go to vote. Scott Kenner stated that when this was discussed, the group mentioned meeting informally in the off months. Sarah Anderson asked about the July agenda so they could meet about it in June. DFO Shawn Cochran stated this would make it a formal meeting requiring full FACA compliance (and submission to the Federal Registry). He then mentioned the BKNF met with Sec Hagen, SD Dept Tourism, and is hoping to see how gateway communities benefit from tourism and to expand recreational opportunities. Sarah Anderson stated she believes it is important that the Board members continue to meet monthly, and it provides a good opportunity to address topics in more detail.

Chairperson Rachel Nelson expressed thanks for everyone coming in and providing input.

DISCUSSION OF NEXT MEETING

Next NFAB Board Meeting is scheduled for July 17, 2024, at the Mystic Ranger District in Rapid City, SD.

Chairperson Rachel Nelson requested a motion to adjourn.

Motion to adjourn made by Sarah Anderson; Seconded by Jim Scull. Unanimous consent to approve.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 2:50 P.M.

I hereby certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the foregoing minutes are accurate and complete.



6/20/2024

Krista Landreneau
Executive Assistant
Black Hills National Forest



6/20/2024

Rachel Nelson
Chairperson
Black Hills NF National Forest Advisory Board

These minutes will be formally considered by the Board at its next meeting, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes of that meeting.