

4/21/09 Swan Lands Coordinating Committee Meeting Notes

Participants: Melanie Parker, Mo Hartmann, Beth Gardner, Chris Servheen, Mark Ruby, Neil Meyer, Pam Hamilton, Dwayne Forder, Bill Moore, Linda Smith, Len Newton, Ryan Lutey, Patrick O'Herren, Dan Roberson, Alan Wood, Greg Neudecker, Amy Royer, Mark Shiltz, Maria Mantas, Robert Rasmussen, Sue Macmeeken, Chris Bryant, Carly Walker.

Neil Meyer: "I've said it before and I'll say it again...shouldn't we leave it as good as or better than we found it?"

Conservation Strategies Subcommittee Report

General Montana Legacy Project (MLP) Updates - Robert Rasmussen

- TNC/TPL have taken ownership of Phase 2 MLP lands (in the Swan, includes most Plum Creek land south of the Swan River State Forest).

- House Bills:

HB674—(formerly HB14), general obligation bond that would allow for the purchase of roughly 26,000 acres of Montana Working Forests lands in the Potomac area, has passed in the state legislature. Support by Swan Valley residents was important in the ultimate success the Bill, which required 2/3 majority.

HB669, revolving loan fund for the distressed timber industry, passed along with HB674.

- The State may ultimately acquire roughly 111,000 acres of the MLP lands.
- TNC/TPL are currently working with Montana FWP and DNRC acquire Phase 3 MLP lands within the Swan River State Forest.
- Nine Phase 3 MLP parcels in the Swan are not currently slated for state or federal disposition. The Flathead National Forest has submitted a Land and Water Conservation Fund to acquire some of these (see April 2009 Conservation Strategies Subcommittee notes for more information - Mike can provide upon request). Over the next year, Swan Valley residents, the community council, the conservation strategies subcommittee, TNC, TPL and others will be working to find appropriate outcomes for the other parcels (both for conservation and community development purposes). Community uses include waste transfer facility, cemetery, history museum and workforce housing.
- MT FWP and others are interested in finding a conservation outcome for Section 3 (adjacent to Elk Creek Conservation Area on Elk Creek). This parcel has outstanding fisheries value. BPA funding for purchase a possibility.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) MLP Land Management/Restoration Updates —Sue McMeekan, Maria Mantas

- Sue is TNC's new silviculturalist.
- TNC's current focus = 92 million board feet for fiber supply agreement. Sue will be determining where that timber will come from.
- Sue's immediate goal is to get out and look at MLP lands on the ground to determine where the timber for the fiber supply agreement will come from.
- TNC will be working with Plum Creek to assess the economic feasibility of fulfilling the fiber supply agreement given timber market conditions/trends.
- If Plum Creek opts out of the fiber supply agreement, TNC/TPL are not obligated to harvest. They do, however, have the option of selling to a different mill.
- TNC restoration work on MLP lands is highly dependent on length of ownership and available funding.
- Still no official word 6 million dollars in stimulus money TNC requested to assist with restoration, though they are confident they will receive the funds. The funding will come through state and private forestry channels - TNC not sure what strings will be attached.
- TNC is working to determine how best to work with all of its partners to get restoration done during its ownership. The restoration focus will be roads, fish passage and weeds.
- TNC needs to determine what lands they'll need to access for timber harvest before deciding where to do road restoration (don't want to restore roads that will end up as a haul routes).
- TNC will be a signatory to Swan Valley Grizzly Bear Conservation Agreement. No additional amendments are anticipated at this time.
- TNC will utilize local contractors where possible to help the Swan Valley meet its "triple bottom line" (ecology, economy, community).
- Steve Kloetzel is the main TNC contact for resource issues on MLP lands.
- Stakeholders agree we need to conduct a restoration assessment of the Swan Valley to determine appropriate sources of restoration funding and identify important projects.
- Block management is still an issue for FWP and others - TNC is working on a programmatic block management plan for all MLP lands in FWP regions 1 and 2.

- With regard to the road access issue, TNC's goal is to maintain status quo regarding public access for ownership and recreation.

Missoula County Rural Initiatives Practical Landscape Assessment for Conservation and Enhancement (PLACE) Project - Carly Walker

- Goal of Project is to identify important areas, specify strategies for protecting those areas, and est. a foundation for future community discussions about conservation and planning.
- PLACE Project provides an opportunity for stakeholders to share historical, cultural and natural resource information with each other.
- Three main phases = (1) Map resources (GIS intensive part of project) (2) Prioritize areas (3) Develop a plan.
- Timeline: 2009-2011.
- Resource inventory map will be completed and made available late this year.
- Carly is working with all of the communities in the County to gather resources, solicit input.
- Rural Initiatives resources will be available for local efforts.

Wildlife Subcommittee Report - Mark Ruby

Events Updates

- Bear Social scheduled for April 30, 6-8pm - fun event, open venue meant for good Q&A.
- Swan Valley Bear Fair will be held again this summer – August 01 on the Hungry Bear lawn.

Bear Taskforce Updates

- Bear Taskforce now Swan Valley Bear Resources Group (see flow chart handout for structure)
- Group will focus on education as well as regulation.
- Group will be working with Tim Manley (FWP) on bear attractant issues (bear containers, fencing, assisting landowners with cost and set up, etc.).
- Group will be working to create neighborhood networks and identify local leaders (getting residents to assist each other in addressing bear issues within neighborhoods). Will also allow Group to identify bear movement and issue patterns by neighborhood, which would ultimately lead to the development of a master database and maps.

Loon Updates

- Loon updates – Loons recently sighted on Loon Lake. New sighting and possible new nest location on Kraft Creek Road wetland.

Forest Stewardship Subcommittee Report

Stimulus funding updates - agency staff

Flathead National Forest should be receiving substantial funding for shovel ready projects - exact projects and amounts yet to be determined.

Jumpstart project funds (stimulus money to implement fuels reduction projects) did come to state, but none to the Swan specifically. There May be additional Jumpstart opportunities, also through the State.

- No other updates from agencies. At this point there are more questions than answers.

DNRC White Porcupine Multiple Timber Sale Project Update - Dan Roberson

Project was approved by the Land Board yesterday. The harvest will occur over a three year period. Local contractor employment opportunities do exist (DNRC estimates 220 jobs per year stemming from Project). There are restoration components involved (addressing insect and disease issues). Project entails harvest of approx. 1100 acres of old growth and construction 14 miles of new road - these constituted primary arguments against it.

DNRC will be partnering with stone container to remove pulpwood within sale area.

USFS Summit Salvage Timber Sale Project Update- Beth Gardiner

Intent of project to address high levels of mountain pine beetle kill in Clearwater/Swan divide area.

Project area approx. 1,300 acres. S

Scoping letter is out. Field trip is planned for June 22th.

Wetlands Subcommittee Report

Collaborative Swan Valley wetland restoration project - Mike Palladini, Greg Neudecker

- SEC and Northwest Connections (NwC) are working with Montana Partners for Fish and Wildlife and Intermountain West Joint Venture to increase capacity for wetland and bird habitat conservation and restoration in the Swan Valley.

- Current accomplishments:

Have completed digital National Wetland Inventory (NWI) mapping for entire watershed - data is now available for use in GIS analysis. SEC will make this data available to the MT Natural Heritage Program and USFWS (for posting on NWI website).

Wetlands subcommittee has completed systematic, qualitative wetland restoration prioritization analysis of entire watershed south of State Forest (using 2005 NAIP imagery and GIS data).

- Next step - pursue specific on-the-ground projects with willing landowners (including TNC/TPL).
- Question: can flood plain mapping be done in conjunction with the other water quality efforts? Answer - expensive and time consuming - FEMA ultimately needs to complete it, not practical for the Swan in the short-term.

TNC/NFF Water Howellia Project - Maria Mantas

- TNC / National Forest Foundation (NFF) water howellia project:

There are many restoration needs within associated with wetlands on MLP lands. (e.g. logging slash/mill waste in vernal pools).

This NNF grant was offered to assist with restoration work on MLP Phase 1 lands. The focus will be restoration within the Fish Creek drainage, w/ a smaller amount of funding allotted for Swan. The grant emphasizes 'community based' monitoring - TNC included a community volunteerism component to their proposal. Maria is looking to engage in community-assisted water howellia monitoring in the Swan.

NwC may be able to find money to pay field workers. Melanie and Maria will talk about next steps.

Beth encouraged monitoring amphibians and collecting other ecological data while at the monitoring sites.

Water Quality Subcommittee Report

EPA 319 Grant updates - Beth Gardiner

- EPA 319 grant allowed for development of TMDL plan to address sources of pollution into Swan Lake. Primary source of pollution identified = sediment from roads. An inventory of all open roads in the watershed was conducted quantify sediment contribution - included assessment of 700 stream crossings. The 319 grant has helped to address related restoration needs.

- Road restoration projects have been completed or are ongoing in Cold, Elk, Beaver, and Kraft Creek drainages.
- Lake monitoring focused on oxygen depletion in Swan Lake will continue.
- New Swan Valley 319 requires/provides funding for watershed-scale restoration planning (includes public and private lands). This effort should be coordinated with other similar efforts.

Additional notes

Seeley Swan Blackfoot Stewardship Summit Report - Melanie Parker

- Questions addressed - What warrants collective action? How can we leverage each others work?
- 4 next steps identified so far (planning group working on additional next steps):
 1. Submit a tri-watershed Forest Landscape Restoration Act proposal to address stewardship needs on both public and private land.
 2. Get stimulus dollars into local hands – find the right contracting mechanisms for this.
 3. Coordinate with the Blackfoot Challenge on conservation challenge resource information.
 4. Help keep Pyramid Lumber in business.

***Next meeting will be in September - date TBD (Mike will send out availability poll).**