

Rocky Mountain Front Ranchlands Group

Steering Committee Meeting Minutes

Sept. 13, 2023 / 5:30 PM / Buffalo Joe's Dupuyer, Montana

ATTENDEES

Trina Bradley, Mark Hitchcock, Diane Collins, Clayton Gernaat, Jonathan St. Goddard, Jim Hodgskiss, Morgan Marks, Bill Spahr, Skippy Sims, Jack Austin

AGENDA

Clayton called the meeting to order and read the minutes from the March 30, 2023 meeting. Diane moved to approve the minutes as read; Mark seconded. Motion passed.

Trina gave the financial report. RMFRG currently has a balance of \$8318.56, but \$2500 of those funds need to be returned to NPCA, and \$3000 of those funds are designated for MT Conflict Reduction Consortium.

Skippy Sims, USDA Wildlife Services, gave an update on the season to date. He said it has been a relatively quiet summer, but there has been some recent depredations near Birch Creek. The culprit is believed to be a sow with yearling cubs. Skip reported that coyotes have been a major problem this year, and he is working to set some flying dates for the fall. Mark asked Skip why the depredations are down this year, and Skip said he believes it is because so many of the problem bears have been lethally removed in the last couple years.

Kraig Glazier, USDA Wildlife Services, also sent a report for the meeting. Kraig said depredations are down for grizzlies and wolves. Overall, the numbers of livestock damages confirmed and reported by all species are down by 24%. WS handled/removed eight grizzlies in regards to livestock damages and four wolves, compared to 1,089 coyotes – double the average take.

Jack Austin, MTFWP Grizzly Bear Technician, gave an update on his season. He covers Muddy Creek and north, and is Wesley's tech. Jack reported 9 cattle depredations, and a handful of instances where bears got into bees, grain, and garbage. There were a total of 31 complaints and conflicts over the summer.

The carcass program removed 485 livestock carcasses to the Valier landfill, which is enclosed in an electric fence. Jack worked on education events and electric fence construction and maintenance. He and Wesley trapped 8 bears – mostly yearlings – and lethally removed one of those bears.

Morgan Marks and Bill Spahr from One Montana gave a presentation on their Master Hunter program. More information can be found at

www.mtmasterhunter.com. Montana hunters aged 21 years or older with at least three years of hunting experience can take the master class. Classes are held around the state, and take two-three day weekends. The Master Hunter program is an ambassador program, not an access program. One Montana is working to build a better brand of hunter, and help hunters be better stewards of the land and also learn more about agriculture. One Montana is taking applications for the 2024 Master Hunter classes beginning in Oct. 2023. They are also looking for landowners to participate in panel discussions and host project events. Morgan is in charge of landowner relations, and can be reached at morganm@onemontana.org or 406.403.4464.

Trina gave an update on her activities as Executive Director. Trina has attended several meetings and conventions, and has done a handful of interviews with the press and others.

Trina was a featured speaker at the Conflict Reduction Workshop in Missoula in June. There, she was able to make several new connections, as well as share her experiences with conflict reduction practices. She was also chosen to be featured on a short film that Heart of the Rockies Initiative will use to bring more funding and awareness to conflict prevention in the west.

Trina attended the Livestock Loss Board meeting in Big Timber Aug. 14. The LLB received \$103,338 in grant requests, and awarded \$78,106. The LLB will hold another round of conflict prevention grants this fall, starting Oct. 1 and ending Nov. 15. To apply, visit their website at www.llb.mt.gov. There is approximately \$96,894 available.

Trina also met with FWP numerous times, traveled to Helena to testify during the Legislative session, and has kept in contact with USFWS, Western Landowners Alliance, and Heart of the Rockies Initiative.

Trina applied for and received a \$7000 capacity grant from an anonymous foundation, and is working on finding more funds.

Trina was elected the Chair of the Montana Conflict Reduction Consortium, which is a subcommittee of the West-wide Conflict Reduction Consortium, a

project of Western Landowners Alliance's Working Wild Challenge. Many of her duties with that office will overlap with her ED duties.

Trina is still serving as the Chair of the Montana Stockgrowers Association Endangered Species Act Subcommittee. If anyone has suggestions for policy, she will be introducing it in Dec. at Convention.

Trina has several upcoming meetings and conventions:

Sept. 25 – FWP Bear Aware Event in Shelby

Sept. 27 – FWP stakeholders meeting in Helena

Oct. 4-6 – Private Lands Partners Convention in Missoula

Oct. 10 – North Cascades Ecosystem Subcommittee Meeting (hopefully virtual)

Oct. 18 – Bitterroot Ecosystem Subcommittee Meeting (hopefully virtual)

Nov. 8-9 – Yellowstone Ecosystem Subcommittee Meeting in Jackson, WY

Nov. 14- Cabinet/Yaak Ecosystem Subcommittee Meeting (hopefully virtual)

Nov. 28-29 – NCDE Ecosystem Subcommittee Meeting in Polson

Dec. 2 – Livestock Loss Board Meeting in Billings

Dec. 6-8 Montana Stockgrowers Association Convention in Billings

Dec. 12-18 – Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee Executive Meeting in Bozeman

Jan. 30-Feb. 1 – IGBC Bear Summit in Coeur d'Alene, ID

Clayton reported that the annual Marias River Livestock Association Rib Tickler is set for Friday, Nov. 8 at the Marias Valley Golf Course.

Fundraising for RMFRG was discussed. Mark made a motion to form a planning committee for a fundraiser. Diane seconded. Motion carried. The committee consists of Clayton (chair), Mark, Diane, Jim, and Jonathan. The committee will report back to the steering committee via email by Sept. 23.

Mark made a motion to reorganize as a steering committee annually at our December meeting. Jonathan seconded. Motion carried.

The December steering committee meeting was discussed. It was decided to hold the December meeting at Buffalo Joe's Dec. 15 or 16. We will plan a no-host meal for all interested producers, and line up a speaker.

Diane moved to adjourn the meeting, and Mark seconded. Meeting adjourned at 8:20 p.m.