

Madison County Interagency Coordinating Group  
Madison County Administrative Office Building, Virginia City, Montana.  
Thursday, January 14, 2106  
1:30 P.M.

**Attendees:**

David Schulz	Madison County Commissioner (District 1) - Chairman
Ron Nye	Madison County Commissioner (District 2)
Jim Hart	Madison County Commissioner (District 3)
Gordon Ash	Acting Ranger for Dale Olson, Madison Ranger District, US Forest Service
Cornie Hudson	Field Ranger, Dillon Field Office, Bureau of Land Management
Jeff Welborn	Montana House of Representatives (Filed for Montana Senate Seat)
Sunni Heikes-Knapton	Madison Watershed Coordinator
Dean Waltee	Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Wildlife Biologist
Ron Hopper	Ennis Fish Hatchery – Fish Biologist
Tim Eagan	Montana Dept of Natural Resources & Conservation, Dillon

Commission Chair, David Schulz, noted that he filed for reelection for his Commissioner position and then brought the meeting to order at 1:35 p.m. requesting that all present introduce themselves.

**Approval of Minutes:** Jim Hart moved to approve the minutes from the October 9, 2015 meeting, with corrections. Cornie Hudson seconded the motion. All voted aye and the motion carried.

**INFORMATION SHARING:**

**Tim Eagan:** discussed the following topics:

- Land exchanges with SRI Holdings on the Jefferson and Beaverhead Rivers. Also included is land and an easement in Rochester Basin. Tim stated there is opposition to the trade and that river groups are not in favor of it. They are waiting to hear from the land board.
- They have been working with Margie on weed spray days. They are all set up. They are working together on State and BLM sections.
- Chuck has 45 range surveys to do this next summer.
- There were a number of recreational vehicle issues during the past hunting season. This seems to be getting worse and worse. They are concerned about spreading weeds. More and more patches of weeds showing up that they didn't know were there.
- They are in the new office. Have been there for about a year. Thanked Jeff for helping them out with that.
- They will have basic fire training for Beaverhead and Madison at the end of the month. Will also conduct an intermediate class.
- Also working on timber sales in Madison and Beaverhead.
- There was further discussion related to the proposed land exchanges and proposed fishing access sites.
- Tim also noted that the Sheriff's Office is going to put a repeater on state property. They have given him a land use license and are waiting for the power to be connected.

**Ron Hopper:** discussed the following topics:

- Ron noted that they are a brood-stock facility and are making fish eggs. They are working with 6 strains of Rainbow Trout. 14 million eggs this year, which is down a little from normal. These are shipped all over the country. Are getting calls for more.

- Effluent project is halfway through. The vacuum system will suck up fish waste and excess food, pumps it out into cells and filters it through rocks. The end result will be water that is borderline drinking quality.
- Were able to hire a couple new biologists as a result of a waiver on the hiring freeze. Have been pretty short-handed for the past couple of years. Staffing issues were further discussed.
- They are the largest brood-stock facility in the nation. Were on the chopping block for a while.

**Jim Hart:** discussed the following topics:

- Jim reported that winter maintenance is ongoing, roads, etc. It's always a challenge.
- Moore's Creek project is now in full swing. The plan is to start on the north end and head up stream. Parking lot area, Main Street, and highway 287 should be done this winter.
- Blaine and Varney Bridges are on-going projects. Blaine is scheduled to start this summer. Varney should start in 2017-2018. Still looking for private donations and a possible FLAP grant.
- Madison Valley Manor is in the process of an interior renovation project. It is about one third of the way done. Darcel is on target in keeping things straight.
- In the mist of finding another location for a carcass composting site. The latest possible spot is the Alder Solid Waste Container / Junk Vehicle site.
- Big Sky is considering a TIF/Targeted Economic Development District to assist with infrastructure needs. Will be quite a long process. Need to determine what affect it might have on the rest of the County and Gallatin County. Will keep folks updated.
- An application has been submitted for a Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) grant for Cliff and Wade Lakes Road. A previous application had fallen through the cracks so a new one will be submitted.

Sunni had questions about the TIF/TEDD process and what the potential consequences are. Sunni noted that her supervisors would like to stay informed on the status.

**Dean Waltee:** discussed the following topics:

- Dean noted that the Wildlife Management manager position vacated by Kevin Hughes has not been filled. Has been approved and he's really hoping it gets filled. Dave Green was hired and has been full time through the winter. Doing winter maintenance. Has done a really good job. He has shown interest in the full time position.
- Dean discussed check stations that he conducted through-out hunting season including an Antelope check station at Kidd, visited with 180 hunters in two days. He gave numbers and percentages, stating that it was a very productive antelope season. He ran the check station in Alder for three days this year. The harvest rate was almost double from last year with a very robust elk harvest. Had some real issues with people using closed roads or driving off road. Will be working with DNRC to resolve some of these issues.
- Dean discussed post season surveys noting that he had looked at four areas, Tobacco Roots, Snowcrests, Sweetwater, and Red Rock. He noted there were very good conditions so a lot of fawns were produced. A large number of deer and a hard winter could prove to be a challenge. Also discussed elk surveys, management hunts, Mountain Goat surveys, and plans to conduct Moose surveys in the Upper Ruby, Blacktail, etc. Healthy number of Moose with good distribution although ratio of young to old is not so great.
- He and Craig Feger put out barrels to conduct sage grouse wings. Good ratio of juveniles to adults. Will continue to do this annually.

- Discussed Bob Cat, Mountain Lion and Wolf seasons, quotas, and harvests. He also discussed reports of wolf depredations.
- Whitetail numbers are up and they will be looking at adding more antlerless permits prior to next hunting season.
- There was further discussion regarding sage grouse numbers and Big Horn Sheep. Dean also noted that all proposals are available now for public comment and listed a number of public meetings that are scheduled to review the proposals.

**Sunni Heikes-Knaption:** discussed the following topics:

- Sunni noted that the Conservation District has now been around for 70 years. Would like to have a community gathering and get all the former supervisors together, display photos, etc.
- Wrapped up the Moore's Creek / Goggins riparian project. It is now fenced off and has new water tanks. Ideally he would like to dormant graze it next fall.
- They have an interesting project going on at Jack Creek. A property owner has installed Gabian baskets along the creek that are falling in the creek. They are hoping to pull them out and replace them with a willow soil lift this spring. They are trying to get something more conducive to habitat along the creek.
- They are doing an assessment on the lower section of Jack Creek using the same technic. They are aware that it is more prone to channel migration so they are incorporating some bank stabilization but not where they know it's going move.
- Channel migration mapping projects are underway on six rivers including the Madison. They are doing an analysis on aerial photos right now.
- Winter workshops have started. They have partnered with Billy Whitehurst with Extension so they don't overlap. Sunni listed workshops they have conducted and are planning to conduct.
- The annual Conservation Districts Banquet is scheduled for April 16<sup>th</sup> and at the banquet they will be announcing the Stewardship award winner. They are currently taking nominations and conducting a Facebook photo contest.
- They are anticipating DEQ giving answers on waterways by May which will give them an idea on where the previous 16 listed are now. The big one will be a focus on Moore's Creek. Sunni further discussed issues with Moore's Creek.
- The Stream Team, volunteer monitoring program, has done great work, approximately 230 hours last year, prenominal outreach. The next step is to get them involved in data collection, restoration projects, etc.
- About to put out their next Newsletter. If you have anything for it, please let them know.
- They are desperately in need of a vehicle and have been using personal vehicles for work duties. Need a pick-up with an extended cab.
- They have sold a couple pieces of equipment, but still have a couple more to get rid of, including a 300 gallon weed sprayer and air seeder.
- Are working with NRCS on pollinator promotion.

**Jeff Welborn:** Jeff noted that he lives in Dillon and has filed for the Senate seat that encompasses the Dillon area and this portion of Madison County. He noted that he is on a fact finding mission and stated that he is willing to answer any questions that anyone might have.

**Ron Nye:** discussed the following topics:

- Ron met with Congressman Ryan Zinke and talked about buying the property at the Ruby Reservoir where the toilets set. He will take Zinke's field rep up to the site and hopefully get

help accessing funds. There was much discussion about the proposed purchase, including appraisal of the property, agencies that might be able to assist in the purchase, and if the owners are willing to sell.

- He is currently working on two rip-rap projects. The Pennington Bridge project is in the pre-construction phase with a meeting planned for the 28<sup>th</sup>. The High Road Bridge project is partially done and is optimistic that there will be a fishing access site somewhere when it's completed.
- At the Fairgrounds, there a lot of talk about a new livestock pavilion, optimistic on that. Don't know where they'll get the funds but it needs to be done.
- Also talk of getting water and sewer across the river and possibly hooking into the Children's Center. Hopefully something will get done there too.
- The Senior Center in Twin Bridges is in construction and should be done by the end of March.

**Cornie Hudson:** discussed the following topics:

- Cornie noted a correction to the minutes from the last meeting, stating that it was the Birch Meadow Timber Sale that has been completed. She stated they're out of there and they did a great job.
- Cornie started out with some personnel changes they've had. Their Hydrologist retires as of the end of December and they have a new one coming from Alaska named Sean Claffey. She will bring him to the next meeting.
- She talked about a fungus they were planning to put out that would get rid of cheat grass but they weren't able to do it because they didn't have the right conditions. They are confident that they will be able to get it out this spring. There is about 20 acres in the Bear Trap.
- Cornie discussed the Wild Horses noting that there have been about 14 of them out on the Granite Creek Ranch. They have tried several times to get them back in. They got a couple of them but the rest are still loose. She stated that her office has no authority regarding the horses but just help out with the monitoring. They are going in next month to do a horse count. Dean recommended that they use digital photos rather than trying to manually count the horses. Fences are up to snuff. The horses got out because the fences were cut. Cornie noted that Rices have been very responsive.
- The Axolotl Cabin was renovated last year. They are pretty much done and it looks awesome. They added a new kitchen and a new roof. Have gone to rentals at rentals.gov Rentals will begin on March 1, 2016.
- They will be implementing food storage orders this year. The only thing that stopped them last year is that every food storage order around them is different. They are going to try to keep it consistent between agencies.
- Fish, Wildlife and Parks will be taking over shuttle permits that they have on the Madison. BLM will still be doing the special recreation permits.
- She is in an information gathering phase for Revenue Flats. She has done a traffic count and is shocked about the amount of traffic they have in that area. Will monitor this spring and through the summer. Cornie will make a decision this fall on whether to pursue a bike trail or not. Either way some kind of recreational plan will need to be put in place for the area. Law enforcement patrols have been increased for the area. This has made locals happy. There was further discussion regarding the road and other issues on Revenue Flats.
- They are analyzing watersheds assessments this year, so if you have any projects, let them know.

**Gordon Ash:** discussed the following topics:

- Correction to the minutes related to Hill Lake project. Did not finish it. There were issues so they are back to planning.
- They are in the process of seasonal hiring right now. There is going to be a range, fisheries, and “Bear Aware” person, and hopefully a couple of kids.
- Have two snow rangers hired who are monitoring the boundary lines at Mount Jefferson. Have people coming out of Idaho pushing the limits. Will have to take corrective measures to keep them out. This area is under agreement with the State of Idaho and other entities. The Madison Ranger District gets funding to manage the area.
- Scoping for the South Gravelly allotment is starting real quick. Four allotments are involved.
- Wonder Ranch litigation on the Indian Creek Trail is on-going. Gordon discussed the litigation. Noting that trying to re-route the trail head would be very difficult now.
- Their new Fire Management officer has arrived and is in place now.
- Discussed on- going Greenhorn collaborative, timber management, and burning projects.
- Kaye Suzuki will be retiring April 1, 2016.
- Jim Hart asked that when they go to Cliff and Wade and do your portion of the maintaining, can we stay in conversation so that your work doesn’t complicate ours and vice versa.

**Dave Schulz:** discussed the following topics:

- Schulz noted that the County is still plugging away on public lands road project for DNRC.
- He stated that he sits on the Beaverhead Deer Lodge Working Group and that Jim Hart sits on the Custer Gallatin Working Group and discussed topics related to these groups.
- The Helle lawsuit could have a severe impact on producers. One of the best producers is being challenged. Schulz noted that the Madison County Livestock Protective Committee has sent \$5000 to help with the litigation and Madison County has added \$2500 for support.
- The RAC funds that were designated to the South Boulder Road have been shifted the to the Mill Creek Road out of Sheridan and his road crew will be cooperating to do some of the work.
- The new AT&T tower in Sheridan is up and the County is starting to look at options for cell phone service with AT&T.
- Chris Mumme, Director of Emergency Management, has retired and has been replaced by Dustin Tetrault. Dustin has experience in air ambulance, ground ambulance, fire fighting, etc. Lynda Holt, the Communications Coordinator, will be his back-up as DES2.
- Madison County also has a new Sanitarian, Van Puckett, who has military food place inspection experience and brings a lot of other qualities to the table.
- Kathleen Mumme has replaced Peggy Kaatz as the Clerk and Recorder.
- Schulz discussed an Air Ambulance contract that was signed by the County that will be a significant reduction to the personal cost of medical air transportation for county residents.
- Schulz also touched on an accident that occurred in the Upper Ruby when a private vehicle collided with a road grader.

It was noted that future meetings will be held on:

April 14, 2016, at the Madison Ranger Station, Ennis, Montana

July 14, 2016, at the Axolotl Lakes Cabin including the annual BBQ

October 6 and 7, 2016, overnight retreat at the Vigilante Station in the Upper Ruby

With no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 3:50 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Laurie Buyan, Commissioners’ Assistant