

MEETING MINUTES

Meeting/ Project Name:	Noxious Weed Management Advisory Council Meeting		
Date of Meeting:	January 9, 2018	Time:	10:00 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.
Minutes Prepared By:	Carol Bearden	Location:	Heritage Inn, Great Falls Conference Call / GoToMeeting
1. Meeting Objective			
Business Meeting			
2. Attendees			
<p>Council Members: Ben Thomas, Brian Ostwald, Jack Eddie, Jeanette Nordahl, Jim Gordon, Joel Farkell, Kellieann Morris, Kenny Keever, Linda Eklund, Margie Edsall, Todd Wagner</p> <p>Agency Representatives: Adam Sieges, Dan Dobler, Floyd Thompson (for Carmela Romerio), Gary Adams, Joe Merenz, Mike Miller, Steve Shelly, Monica Pokorny*, Dan Lucas*</p> <p>Montana Department of Agriculture (MDA) Staff: Dave Burch, Carol Bearden, Jasmine Reimer, Kim Antonick, Emily Wong</p> <p>Guests: Jeffrey Pettingill, Christian Lehnert, Melissa Maggio-Kassner, Bryce Christiaens, Jane Mangold, Shantell Frame-Martin, Gerardo Vazquez, Taelor Anderson, Dan Williams, AJ Bigby, Mark Couture, Alex Metcalf*</p> <p>* Attended by conference call</p>			
3. Agenda and Notes, Decisions, Issues			
Topic	Discussion		
Welcome & Introductions	<p>Ben Thomas opened the meeting and introductions were made. Adam Sieges was welcomed as the new agency representative for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP). Carmela Romerio was not in attendance, but was named as the new agency representative for the Bureau of Land Management. Ben noted that the five council members with terms ending in June 2017 had been re-appointment to the council.</p> <p>Ben advised the council that Mark Nechodom has joined MDA as Administrator for the Agricultural Sciences Division and that Dave Burch has been serving as Interim Bureau Chief since the retirement of Donna Rise this past fall.</p>		
June 14, 2017 Minutes Review	The minutes from the June 14, 2017 business meeting were reviewed. Jack Eddie moved to approve the minutes as written. Jim Gordon seconded the motion.		
Noxious Weed Trust Fund Budget Report	<p>Dave Burch provided an overview of the noxious weed program budget and the Noxious Weed Trust Fund (NWTF) grant award estimate for FY 2018. Dave reported that non-grant program expenses for FY 2018 are budgeted at \$232,820. This amount is based on 12% of the prior year grant awards from fund 02068 which totaled \$1,940,166 for fiscal year 2017. Non-grant funds are utilized for the noxious weed program operating and personal services costs, council expenses, and a percentage for MDA’s Central Services Division.</p> <p>Dave reported that the \$100,000 MDT pass-through funds have been distributed, with \$1,785.76 going to each of the 56 Montana counties. The \$7,500 Special County/Reservation</p>		

	<p>grants will be distributed to seven tribes and 55 counties (application not submitted by Powder River County), in early spring.</p> <p>Dave advised the council of funding received by MDA from Cooperative Forestry Assistance- Greater Sage Grouse Habitat in addition to the standard Forest Service award. Approximately \$130,000 of the Sage Grouse funding is expected to be distributed through the NWTF in FY 18, 19 and 20. General Fund dollars provided to the NWTF were reported as \$90,410 for FY 18, reduced from \$101,159 due to Legislative reductions.</p> <p>Planned Expenditures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FY 2018 Special County/Reservation grant awards (\$465,000) • Montana Department of Transportation pass through awards (\$100,000) • Allowable non-grant expenditures (\$232,820) <p>Funds available for 2018 NWTF grant hearings:</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 80%;">State Special Revenue Fund (estimate)</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$1,348,180</td> </tr> <tr> <td>General Fund</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$90,410</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Forest Service Funding</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$133,930</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Forest Service Sage Grouse Funding</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$130,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td><u>Reverted Funds (estimate)</u></td> <td style="text-align: right;"><u>\$39,076</u></td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: right;">Total: \$1,741,596</td> </tr> </table> <p>Historical information regarding weed vehicle fee revenue, Noxious Weed Trust Fund (NWTF) interest amounts, reverted funds and grant hearing funding requests were provided to the council. A funding shortfall of approximately \$600,000 is expected for the 2018 hearings. Dave advised that funds available for the 2018 grant hearings will continue to be updated.</p>	State Special Revenue Fund (estimate)	\$1,348,180	General Fund	\$90,410	Forest Service Funding	\$133,930	Forest Service Sage Grouse Funding	\$130,000	<u>Reverted Funds (estimate)</u>	<u>\$39,076</u>	Total: \$1,741,596	
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<p>Project Reviews / Application Updates</p>	<p>Jasmine Reimer informed the council of efforts underway to increase awareness and interest in the NWTF, such as logo development for mugs, hats, brochures, etc., that can be used to advertise the Trust Fund program. The NWTF brochure is available for download from the MDA website. Additional efforts to ease the application process include extending the NWTF application due date to January 6th and streamlining the environmental assessment portion of the application.</p> <p>MDA has reached out to less frequent applicants such as Conservation Districts and others with grant application and EDDMapS training sessions across Montana. Gary Adams inquired about advertisement for NWTF related training sessions. Jasmine will include the council in future notifications of trainings and events.</p> <p>Jasmine provided photos and information about project site visits completed in 2017, noting a reduction in visits due to fire issues. Jasmine encouraged council members to let her know of projects they would like visited and to join her on project visits. Jasmine offered to provide copies of project status reports to interested council members.</p> <p>Locations of the 89 applications submitted for the 2018 grant hearings were mapped and provided to the council. Applications were submitted for 14 research projects, 15 education projects, and 60 local cooperative projects.</p> <p>Discussion followed of additional options to expand awareness of NWTF opportunities, such as public service announcements on Northern Ag Network. Ben Thomas encouraged getting the word out to both applicants and Legislators. Discussion will continue at the March business meeting.</p>												

<p>FWP Grant Program Update</p>	<p>Dave Burch discussed recent meetings with Rick Northrup from FWP, as FWP develops a grant program following the 2017 Legislature approval of the Montana Wildlife Habitat Improvement Act. Federal funding will be granted by FWP through this program for projects that control noxious weeds and restore native landscapes and wildlife habitats. Up to \$2 million will be available annually and Dave encouraged anyone with an eligible project area to contact Dave or Rick.</p> <p>Council applications are currently being accepted by FWP and proposed administrative rules are available for public comment until February 16. Priorities for funding include: lands that are open to public hunting and involve priority wildlife habitats; noxious weed infestations that directly impact habitat functions; broad partnerships; proposals with leveraging beyond the minimum match funding requirement; projects that retain or restore native plant communities; and projects operating at large landscape scales. Grant applications are due to FWP by February 28.</p>
<p>Weed Free Fire Operation Sites</p>	<p>Steve Shelly advised the council of cooperative efforts with eight counties, five western Montana National Forest representatives, and others, in developing protocols and standards to pre-certify sites as weed free for use during fire operations. Protocol approval came June 1, 2017 when signed by the Regional Forester and the implementation phase is planned for the 2018 fire season.</p> <p>Steve said the need for weed free fire operation sites was identified in 2015 on the Clark Fork fire near Noxon, when fire staging sites were being set up in areas with rush skeletonweed. The need to tighten requirements for use of weed free sites was recognized and work began to gain acceptance of new protocol.</p> <p>Steve noted the role of Jeff Gardner who maintains a fire contracting database for the Forest Service and now flags certified sites for fire operation use. County weed districts are helping to build a roster of certified sites, which are inspected annually. Kelliann Morris said site certification inspections does add to the county weed coordinator work load, but she sees it as very important – especially for areas with new invader weeds. Work is underway to refine the site certification field form. Bryce Christiaens added that local knowledge has been an asset in the past and site certification in the database will enhance this information.</p> <p>Kelliann noted the Forest Service database is a great resource and encouraged EDDMapS use as well. Dave Burch and Jasmine Reimer said the EDDMapS Pro version is available for testing for both the Android and the iPhone edition. Jasmine reported that EDDMapS developer Chuck Bargeron, believes that certified fire sites can be added as a layer in EDDMapS Pro. Steve Shelly expects that EDDMapS will be utilized as well as the internal Forest Service database.</p> <p>Certified weed free sites will be utilized for fire operation areas when available, but Kelliann said protocol specifications are being developed for emergency use on non-certified sites that can be mitigated by mowing, treatment, etc.</p> <p>Steve noted that protocol approval by the Regional Forester would not have been possible without inclusion of a clause stating that the protocol does not alleviate the need to take whatever steps necessary to respond to a fire emergency.</p>
<p>Landowner's Perspectives on Weed Control Across Montana</p>	<p>Alexander Metcalf, Research Assistant Professor of the University of Montana Human Dimensions Lab, provided information resulting from a 2017 mail survey aimed at</p>

	<p>understanding landowner involvement in weed control, wildlife, fire, legacy planning and how to effectively make improvements.</p> <p>Approximately 1,300 completed surveys from small to medium landowners in Montana were received by Alex Metcalf and Alice Lubeck for analysis. Alex estimated approximately 20%-30% of the respondents may be non-residents.</p> <p>Survey analysis included landowner behaviors related to location, time, money, knowledge, age, connections between neighbors, and sense of community. Survey results showing a low willingness to apply for government grants was discussed with agreement from Alex that some landowners view government entities as regulators rather than a helpful resource. Alex added that a portion of landowners may see grants as a handout and may be more open to a tax credit for activities such as weed control that they believe should be done on their own.</p> <p>Discussion followed on landowner groups indicated by the survey as most likely to be influenced by outreach efforts. Copies of the survey writeup were distributed to the council and are attached to this document.</p>
<p>Rush Skeletonweed Survey</p>	<p>AJ Bigby, Range Specialist, and Mark Couture, Planning Program Manager from the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe updated the council on 2017 rush skeletonweed survey, mapping, and treatment efforts. Tribal logistic issues due to a variety of landowners and requirement of many approval levels were discussed. Several months of meetings with tribal authorities were completed to obtain necessary approval prior to the July 2017 cooperative survey organized with Tom Benson, Lake County Weed Coordinator, and Dan Williams, Lincoln County Weed Coordinator/Rush Skeletonweed Task Force Coordinator.</p> <p>AJ shared key points from Tom Benson as Tom was not able to attend the meeting. Tom's areas of concern in continued treatment of rush skeletonweed focused on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lack of employees interested in working for Lake County Weed District and the Tribal Lands Department. • Location/accessibility issues regarding weed control treatment. • Ownership and jurisdictional issues pertaining to the reservation – best option is joint presence in the field while treating and monitoring, and sharing GIS/mapping information. • Invasion of rush skeletonweed into cropland. • Herbicide plant back issues particularly near certified seed potato fields. <p>Mark mentioned additional constraints of treatment near medicinal and historical plant locations. 2017 survey efforts on the Buddhist owned property was discussed with Mark and AJ confirming that landowners are aware of the infestations on their land and have been proactive in mapping and maintaining treatment records. Mark and AJ plan to continue survey and treatment efforts and plan to follow up with increased education for landowners.</p> <p>Dan Williams discussed the benefits he saw as a third party involved in coordination between the Tribe and Lake County. Dan noted many positive aspects resulting from the 2017 two-day cooperative rush skeletonweed survey event, including increased medusahead awareness, site surveys, and development of cooperative working relationships.</p>

Dan suggested contacting MSU for student interns that may be able to earn credits while assisting the Lake County Weed District with staffing problems. Dan is willing to assist with other cooperative projects, including a recheck for tansy ragwort in the Lincoln 2017 fire area.

Brian Ostwald asked for input on opening conversations with the Crow Reservation. John Cook was suggested as a resource and Mark encouraged getting one tribal landowner on board by showing how the county can help them, and it will pass by word of mouth. Mark added that with the Crow Agency being under BIA, Brian may want to contact the Superintendent for assistance. Dave Burch offered help, similar to what Dan has done with NWTF grant funding for Lincoln's tansy ragwort in 2016 and the Lake County/Tribe event this past summer.

**Other Business
Public Comment
Agenda Items
Adjourn**

Ben Thomas asked for other business and public comment. None was heard.

The council will meet March 5th for a short business meeting prior to the start of grant hearings that will continue through the week with applicant presentations and conclude with funding deliberations and recommendations on March 9th. The meeting and hearings will be held at the Wingate in Helena.

Jasmine suggested continuing discussion of marketing the NWTF program at the March 5th meeting. The council was asked to send additional agenda topics to MDA staff.

Todd Wagner moved to adjourn the meeting at 1:30 p.m. Kenny Keever seconded the motion.

4. Action Items

Action		Assigned	Due Date	Status
1	Include council members in notifications of future NWTF related trainings and events.	MDA		
2	Provide agenda topics to MDA staff for March 5 th business meeting.	Council	ASAP	
3				
4				
5				