

Tri-County FireSafe Working Group Monthly Meeting Notes

October 10, 2024

Welcome and Introductions- all see attached sign-in sheet.

TCFSWG Programs/Projects Reports

Amy Teegarden gave an update on TCFSWG activities and funding status. See attached reports.

Agency/Partner Reports

- a. **USFS Report Helena/L&C** – No FS representatives attended the meeting, but submitted the following information via email for the Helena Ranger District.
The District has an Engine out on a fire assignment in West Virginia. Overhead supporting various fires in Region 1 that are still active. No new wildfires on the district. Helena and Lincoln Districts have received a \$3M for Collaborative Wildfire Risk Reduction Program. This funding will last over the next three years. Hand thinning contract in the York and Favorite gulch as finished. 300 acres of hand piles. CDT mastication project has finished this week. Working on clearing trail now. Completed 266 acre prescribed burn in American Bar. Region is restricting prescribed burning currently due to budget and National Preparedness upscale. Hopefully burning 275 acres in Spruce Hills this fall once we get the clearance. After that, 300 acres in Wakina Sky.
- b. **USFS-B/D** No Representatives.
- c. **BLM** Cody Phillips reported that in addition to the TCFSWG agreement, he is also managing agreements with Missoula County, The Blackfoot Challenge and West Yellowstone. The TCFSWG agreement is a 2-year agreement, so TCFSWG will need to reapply after two years for another agreement. BLM has crews out on fire assignments.
- d. **DNRC** Kyle Harrington reported that DNRC fire crews are back in Helena at the CLO. He is working with TCFSWG on stewardship projects in the S Hills area. Open house October 19th- all set to go. Outreach efforts being accomplished with local resident of the area.
- e. **NRCS** Andrew reported that deadlines for FY25 programs are coming up. EQUIP (October 25) and CSP (December). The TIPS for these programs have already been established. There have been 41 applications for EQUIP and 9 for CSP. A TIP for FY26 will be established for Dana's Pt. area (Causeway to Lakeside areas) as well as large ranches in the Rocky Mountain Front. Other programs include RCCP- which focuses on Agricultural Land Easements (Broadwater County), Migratory Big Game Initiative, and Livestock Predator Conflicts along the Rocky Mountain Front.

The Western Landowners Alliance that is doing outreach efforts that represent NRCS programs. These meetings will be held Nov 6, 7, & 8. He also reported that the State

Conservationist announced his retirement for the end of the year. This could result in some program/policy changes at some point.

Miranda reported that this is the last year for the Joint Chief's Initiative in the Elkhorns. To date there have been 51 applications. A FY26 TIP will be established in the Sheep Mountain area.

There was discussion about the availability of NRCS to provide funding to TCFSWG. Andrew suggested that maybe TCFSWG might qualify as a Technical Service Provider (would have to sign-up) or RCCP might be another possibility.

- f. St. Peter's Hospital- no representative
- g. NorthWestern Energy Gina Mazza attended. She reported that NWE is still in "fire season"; they are still in the reviewing consequences analysis. Utilizing weather outlooks for 10-mile radius. She also reported that 10 Alert West cameras should be operable by the end of the week. She explained that the cameras use AI detection of smokes. This system is available to the public for use. Discussion about Public Safety Shutoff (PSPS) which is determined by wind events, red flag warnings. Discussion of removal of vegetation from power lines.
- h. FireSafe Montana- no representative

2. City-County Reports

- a. City of Helena - no representative
- b. L&C County- Autum reported that the Southwest Incident Management Team left last week to assist in hurricane relief efforts in FL. Norther Rockies IMT is still focusing on wildfires. There is anticipation of a lot of requests for assistance in the next 3-4 months (from FL). Autum spoke about the flooding at Riverside CG and the outreach efforts regarding "flood after fire" campaign for the Horse Gulch Fire. The September 11th rain event that occurred did not meet thresholds, but flash flooding still occurred. Flooding will be an ongoing threat for the next several years.

The County is working on the Hazardous Mitigation Plan which must be approved by MT DES and FEMA. They are adjusting the timeline for the EOP and are not currently working on the CWPP.

- c. Jefferson County No representative, by Commissioner Kirsch sent an email with the following update regarding potential funding for TCFSWG: *"The county budget was tough this year so most of the remaining title 3 will go to the Sheriff's Office we will keep them in mind if there is anything left we can allocate to them. Also, this money will dry up unless the feds re-authorize the secure rural schools (SRS)funding. We didn't get any this year."*
- d. Broadwater County- no representative

e. Rural Fire Department(s)- no representative

3. Contractor Reports

Jim Cancroft reported that he is gearing up to begin work on the Tom Wise property which is roughly a 100+ acre NRCS funded project. His company is also working throughout the state on various projects. Writing forest management plans to improve grizzly habitat in NW Montana.

There was general discussion about current and planned fuels projects. There appears to be a lot of complimentary overlap between TCFSWG and NRCS projects.

4. Other Items-Comments

Next Meeting November 14, 2024



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Fire Council Notes 10-7-24.

Current Activity

New Applications 30 (6 L&C, 24 Jefferson)

Project Plans 17 (6 L&C, 11 Jefferson)

Fuel Mitigation Projects All funded/ongoing

BLM: 9 projects. Total project cost \$66,038, \$16,509 homeowner funded.

L&C Title 3 funds: 1 project \$25,195, \$6299 homeowner funded.

6 in L&C, 4 in Jefferson

Working on an agreement to add Cascade County to the Working Group.

Private fundraising to offset reserve expenditures and provide funding for grant searches and applications.

Active Grants

Upper Dearborn Fuel Mitigation hazardous fuel grant \$44,000 remaining

Jefferson County Local Government Forestry Assistance Grant *HIZ Assessments only*

Forest Action Plan South Hills Fuel Reduction. Partnering with CLO. \$100,000

Working on a chipper day in town, Prospect Heights HOA

BLM Fuel Mitigation Financial Assistance

Lewis and Clark County Local Government Forestry Assistance Grant *HIZ Assessments only*

Lewis and Clark County Fuel Mitigation Grant *16 acres fuel mitigation, HIZ assessment, fuel treatment plans*

Pending Grants

None

Grant Applications

North Jefferson/South Hills DNRC Hazardous Fuels Grant \$100,000. *20 properties, 53 acres. Reapplied Oct 1*

Year to Date Accomplishments

Home Ignition Zone Risk Assessments: 158 total. 121 outside Helena, FireSafe Helena 37 (**67** in L&C, 43 in Jefferson, 1 in Broadwater, 10 in Cascade)

Projects Completed: 47 (**24** in L&C, 22 in Jefferson, 1 in Broadwater)

Haz Fuels Reduction Acres: 287 (**185** in L&C, 91 in Jefferson, 3.6 in Broadwater)

Structures directly protected: 110 (**67** in L&C, 42 in Jefferson, 1 in Broadwater)

Burns planned: 38 properties, 239 acres (**20** properties, **161** acres in L&C, 18 properties, 78 acres in Jefferson)

Grant Funds Reimbursed to date \$259,734

Property Owner Match \$90,186

Total grant funds expended \$349,920

Number of contractors 12

Lois Olsen

Board President/Interim Executive Director