

REPORT ON WINTER INTERLOCAL MEETING, 2/13/13
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The Winter Interlocal meeting was held February 13, 2013 at the Community Building in Glacier National Park. Over 50 people attended. The meeting was chaired by Rox Rogers, U.S Fish & Wildlife Service/Montana Partners for Fish and Wildlife.

Landowner Organizations. Alan McNeil reported on behalf of the North Fork Compact and the North Fork Landowners' Association; Molly Shepherd on behalf of the NFLA's Fire Mitigation Committee; Randy Kenyon on behalf of the North Fork Preservation Association; and Ray Brown on behalf of the North Fork Road Coalition for Health and Safety.

Members of the Compact, the NFLA and the Preservation Association are participating in Whitefish Range Partnership discussions. According to Dave Hadden of Headwaters Montana, the partnership has had a successful start. He's optimistic about reaching consensus on many aspects of management of the Whitefish Range region. For example, participants recently reached consensus on the snowmobiling issue. The group plans to appoint committees to do research and make recommendations on some other issues. It hopes to present a consensus document to the Forest Service later this year.

Flathead County. Dave Prunty of the County Road Department represented the county commissioners. He discussed secondary road funding program, in which counties in the Missoula District of the Montana Department of Transportation compete for federal dollars. Each county submits one project that it hopes to undertake. The Canyon-to-Camas section of the North Fork Road was on the short list for improvements. The county decided to give priority to improving West Reserve, however, based on the anticipated growth factor in the area.

Prunty also reported that the county plans to finish narrowing the Big Creek to Camas Creek section of the road in June, conditions permitting. He anticipates that they will selectively "spot crush" portions of the lower road with gravel from the DeMers pit, with financial assistance from RAC. Most of the surface will be pit run.

This year, RAC again funded dust abatement using magnesium chloride for the stretch of road from Camas to Polebridge. In addition, the county will offer its dust cost-share program for private landowners, with a ½ mile minimum. Prunty commented that the further North you go on the road, the fewer improvements you're likely to see. Although the county is aware of problems on the northern section of the road, it lacks the resources to address them. The department will try to mitigate drainage issues, however.

U. S. Forest Service. Rob Davies is the new ranger for the Hungry Horse/Glacier View District, serving previously in the Gallatin Forest. He reported that funding is

down about 80% for road work this year. Nonetheless, the Forest Service plans to do some brushing and blading on Trail Creek Road.

Two timber sales are underway. The HayMor Stewardship Sale will wrap up in two weeks. The Red Whale Sale is ongoing. Logging will continue this Winter as long as conditions permit. It will resume this Summer and continue into next Winter. Planting projects are scheduled for the Red Dwarf, Red Whale and Werner Peak areas.

Davies acknowledged the human waste problem caused by dispersed camping at Sondreson Meadow. The installation of facilities is incompatible with the North Fork's Scenic River designation, however. Thus the Forest Service will focus on self-containment and enforcement.

The Forest Service and Glacier National Park are working on a comprehensive river plan, currently gathering and analyzing river user data. Given the shortage of funds, a draft plan probably won't be available for about a year. The data will be important in deciding whether to implement a permit system for rafting on the North Fork. The data does show that local use of the river is up.

The Crown of the Continent group is working to consolidate transboundary data bases. They've had success so far with aquatic invasive species.

The Forest Service planning process envisages collaboration and public input prior to adoption of a new Forest Plan for the Flathead Forest. Davies anticipates a three-year period for input, beginning in June 2013. Information about the process is available on the Forest Service website.

Glacier National Park. Scott Emmerich related that the Park is studying fishers' DNA to determine if they're related to pine martens.

Denise Germann discussed the red bus issue. She emphasized that the Park doesn't intend to take the buses off the road but will develop new strategies to keep them running. With regard to construction on the Going-to-the-Sun Road, June 21 is the earliest possible opening for 2013. Rehabilitation of the road should be completed by 2017, a 10-year process. \$20-25 million will be required to complete the project.

Phil Wilson is the new Chief of Science and Resources Management for the Park. In response to questions, he acknowledged that the Park has not done road dust studies. However, he and others remarked that the Park hasn't observed impacts or any degradation of air or water quality related to the North Fork Road. Several North Fork residents would like to see more data on air and water quality, including baseline data about water quality where the North Fork crosses from Canada into the U.S.

The lake trout mitigation project has been underway for four years. The head of the project believes they're on track to crash the population, despite logistical challenges. Lake trout are in the river, even up in Canada. Fish dams are under consideration to prevent lake trout from migrating into Park lakes.

Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks. John Squires from the Rocky Mountain Research Station in Missoula reported on his lynx research. Northwestern Montana is critical territory and they're now using high-tech strategies to map lynx habitat. They're also trying to understand how lynx and snowshoe hares, their prey, respond to fire. The Whitefish Range has not yet been studied extensively but has lots of potential for determining how lynx use areas that have burned at different times. Fuels mitigation probably doesn't affect them, but may affect snowshoe hares.

On the fish front, an environmental assessment was issued in early February about the hybridization of rainbow and cutthroat trout. FWP wants to keep rainbows out of the North Fork and is focusing on the confluence of the North and Middle Forks.

A basin-wide count of bull trout redds was conducted last Fall. 500 redds were identified, similar to the last count in 2008. The count is twice what was seen in the '90's but half that seen in the '80's. The North Fork count is less than the Middle Fork count and the U.S. counts are less than the Canadian counts; FWP speculates that handling by fishermen may be responsible for lower counts on the North Fork.

Tim Thier and Kent Laudon provided an update on the wolf hunting and trapping season. The North Fork quota of two wolves has not yet been filled; only one wolf has been taken. The North Fork quota will remain at two for various reasons, among them Glacier National Park's position, concerns about maintaining connectivity and the fact that wolf recolonization began in the North Fork. Furthermore, the North Fork offers the opportunity to see how deer and elk populations do in an area with a small quota compared with how the populations do in an area with a large quota.

In 2011, the minimum number of wolves in Montana was 653. FWP is working with 2012 data now and Laudon estimates the minimum number will be larger, well above the state's target population of 450 wolves. He remarked that wolves are still recolonizing; their story is more about territorial expansion than increased density.

DNRC. Brian Manning reported that the DNRC had entered into a conservation plan with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service last Winter, which will lead to some changes in road management. On the North Fork, the plan may result in more protection for lynx in riparian areas.

The DNRC has an active timber sale on the Coal Creek Forest. Work will resume this Summer. On the Moose sale, the DNRC will conduct a survey to determine the survival rate of the trees planted on the North side of the project. More slashing, piling and burning are anticipated on the South side. Manning asks North Fork

residents to let him know about weed patches; the DNRC is trying to compile a GIS map of weed infestations on state lands.

USGS. Vince Angelo reported on three cutthroat projects. One is on Akokola Creek, which offers great habitat. Another entails a Park-wide assessment of cutthroat genetics. The third involves U.S./British Columbia collaboration, radio collaring and planting cutthroat between Trail Creek and the Border and determining where they spawn.

Summer Interlocal. The Summer Interlocal meeting will begin at noon on Wednesday, July 10, 2013 in Sondreson Hall. The host has not been decided. The Interlocal will be preceded by the North Fork's annual FireWise Day program.