

Meeting was called to order by John Hollenback at 6:40 pm on September 21, 2017 at the Elks in Deer Lodge. Members present were: Louis Smith, John Beck, Dan McQueary, Pat Hansen, Jodi Pauley, John Hollenback, Jason Swant, Bill Pierce. FWP present: Rick Northrup, Jason Lindstrom, Brady Shortman, Julie Golla.

Mike went over the Spotted Dog Management Plan. He started out with talking about the DNRC state owned lands and working with them on possibly purchasing those lands from DNRC. Right now FWP leases the grazing rights from DNRC but they want to maximize those lands for state land trusts and that doesn't always work very well inside a WMA.

Mike said in July and August they did some scoping to see if it was worth working on this deal or not. He said it was put out to the public and got around 30 comments back and there were several comments from both ends of the spectrum on whether this purchase was worthwhile or not. He said we did a tour of the Spotted Dog and talked about the project. He said one of the things that came out of that conversation was they felt like they needed to do a land exchange where those lands are put more in a block rather than selling it off. That way DNRC lands stay in Powell County to generate income for school trusts, etc. and there was displeasure that DNRC is land banking and there was opposition to this if DNRC received this money from FWP then DNRC turns around and buys private property and this doesn't settle well with some of the public.

Mike said after this meeting they tried to figure out what was the next best step. FWP does not have a problem with DNRC and their management schemes concerning forest management, etc. FWP is most interested in winter range, and habitat such as bunch grasses, etc. for wildlife. He said the alternative is purchasing the property, take no action or a third is a land exchange between agencies. He said after they thought about it they really do not want to give up those sections within the Spotted Dog. He said the one idea they came up with is giving DNRC the checkerboard sections to the east within the Forest Service area and then some trading in the middle. That comes out to about 5000 acres and then they would purchase the rest from DNRC. DNRC would then get those sections that are mostly timbered.

Mike said he sat down with DNRC and they are interested in the land exchange but the short term impacts did not pencil for them on the grazing leases because right now there is not enough harvestable timber to make it work. They also ran into statute issues as the land exchange has to be equal in value or better and this is written into statute that those appraisals have to be full value.

Mike said he understands that the goal has been a land exchange for some time to make it less complicated for each agency as it would be good government, good for the county and good for FWP.

Bill asked why couldn't FWP pay extra for those properties. Rick said if the state gives up real market value it is a breach of state law. Bill said why wouldn't each agency benefit if the exchange had less value but the money exchanged was more. Mike said it has to be equal value in land exchange and money exchange. Right now those sections intermingled in the Forest Service just doesn't have marketable timber and does not have the value to make a trade. Jason asked if negotiation have been stopped and Mike said yes that is correct. Rick said they really wanted to move in the direction of having blocks of land just like FWP all in one chunk. Mike said the public did express interest in the land exchange and they explored those options with no feasible solution so now they are looking at a purchase of those DNRC sections. John asked if any NRD money would be used for the purchase of those state lands. Mike said no. Rick said it comes from habitat Montana program, most of it comes from hunting licenses, the other 75 percent would come from Pittman Robinson Funds. Rick said those funds can vary widely. At one time it was over \$20 Million. Bill said why can't FWP buy DNRC sections out and then DNRC buy these outlying sections from FWP. Rick said most of the time they want to increase the value of the property they reinvest in and those sections may not be appealing to them. Rick said both agencies scoped this together but DNRC will release an EA within the next couple of weeks but FWP needs an appraisal before the EA goes out. DNRC will report to land board and then FWP will report to their own board and then the land board. Mike said more comment period will be coming out in the next couple of months and hopefully the deal would be closed by August of 2018.

## Draft of Management Plan:

Mike said there was not a lot of notes since the last draft. Mike said we did add bird and bird watching within the Spotted Dog. He said they did some work on Species of concern and pages 37 and 38 were added by Kristi DuBois. They also added interpretive signage area on page 55 and how they would be implemented into the WMA. He said he added the invasive weed management section and that photo plots would be established to monitor invasive species, grass species, etc.

John felt the draft was close to going out for public comment. Julie felt it ready to get some feedback rather than just having the comments from the room. Jason felt like it touches all areas either broadly or very specific and he thinks it is ready to head out for public comment. He wondered if we could put it out to maybe a few groups, invite them to the next meeting, have some feedback and then send out to the public. John said what kind of protocol do you use on these management plans. Rick said we put out public notice in the newspaper, have it available to downloads and also by mail if requested for about 30 days and then take in those comments, compile them and move forward with those recommendations. Julie said as it stands right now she feels it is a pretty strong document and she is anxious to see what the public's comments are. John said after the comment period and the plan is finalized does it have to go in front of the commission. Rick said no we would not have to put it in front of the commission. John asked what is the timeline now to get it out to the public. Mike said FWP still needs to go over it more thoroughly before it goes out. Jodi felt the committee needs to read up on the document before the next meeting as we have not met for awhile, so by the next meeting come back with comments and suggestions and then move forward. It was suggested that comments on the document be back to Mike by October 11<sup>th</sup> and then he will have time implement those changes before the October 19<sup>th</sup> meeting and then they can move forward.

Julie said her and Kelvin did look at range resources within the Spotted Dog some this summer but with the dry summer and fire danger they did not do much on the ground work and they are continuing to work with surrounding landowners.

There was a question about the land exchange with Canyon Ranch and it is still moving forward slowly and should have an EA within the next couple of months.

There was a question about the trespass cattle on the East side, Rick said it is under contract to be fenced but because of fire restrictions that will not happen before Spring of 2018. Dan said it is pretty difficult to keep the fences up because of elk movement and anywhere next to Forest Service you will have trees down on the fence.

Meeting was adjourned,

Respectfully submitted,

Jodi Pauley, Secretary