

Government to Government
Custer County Board of Commissioners AND Salmon/Challis National Forest
Proceedings for 7/8/2019

Commissioner Wayne Butts Commissioner Chairman called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM. He welcomed everyone and asked for introductions around. Those present from Custer County were himself, Steve Smith/Commissioner, Randy Corgatelli/Commissioner, Tina Hawkins/Deputy Clerk, Jim Hawkins/NRAC Chairman, Paul May/NRAC, Gordon Fulton/NRAC, David Philips/NRAC, Harriet Henderson/NRAC with Steve Bauchman in the audience. Attending on behalf of the Salmon/Challis NF were Chuck Mark/Forest Supervisor, Josh Milligan/Forest Plan Leader, Nick Shade/Recreation Program Manager, Faith Ryan/Range Specialist, and Matt Paciorek/Acting Deputy Forest Supervisor. The agenda topics to be discussed were Range/Grazing, and Wild & Scenic Rivers as time allowed.

Chairman Wayne Butts gave Jim Hawkins the job as moderator. Jim thanked Chuck for bringing the team leaders, and began by asking Faith if she had read the Custer County Resource Management Plan? Faith responded that she has read the plan. Jim stated the County would like to return to 1972 cattle numbers, but realize it won't happen all at once, as many different reasons lead to the decrease in cattle numbers. Our desire is to talk about grazing and what can be done to work toward those historic number again. Custer County ranges are in good shape, and there is room for more livestock out there.

Faith noted what the county holds important, and hears that the county wants to increase cattle numbers. The management of vegetation impacts water and nutrient cycling, which make it very important to everyone. She also noted the social and economic downward trends. Some grazing permits have had been retired with waivers and no preference named. The FS needs some advice on how to address this. Jim asked "if the preference is waived, is there any opportunity for another user to pick up the permit?" Faith responded that the USFS has not been re-allocating the permits. In most cases it encompasses the full allotment. Faith gave specific examples on sheep allotments that have been waived, with each having a different reason for retirement. Commissioner Butts asked about writing language into the new Forest Plan to encourage renewal of these permits, starting perhaps as a "forage reserve". Faith responded they need to have language in place in the new forest plan to enable renewals. Chuck Mark stated the FS could write language into the plan to include broad direction for use of vacant allotments. Josh Mulligan also stated, a foundation is needed within the forest plan to move forward with re-allocation of grazing AUM's, so the obligation to do NEPA is justified. Commissioner Corgatelli expressed the need to encourage younger people by offering grazing opportunities that are not currently available.

Faith asked about the County thoughts on making the range providers (USFS) and range users (Ranchers) partners rather than combatants. There are currently 3000 fence structures, and 30% are known to need reconstruction. There is a long waiting list for materials to do these repairs, even if the permittee is willing to do the work. There is a huge need for a better understanding of monitoring, and more cooperative monitoring with both sides participating. There is a MOU between the USFS and the National Cattle Association on range monitoring. Jim responded that the current MOU agreement is extremely formal, and very difficult for permittees to complete. He would not want to sign it himself. Some revision is need on that MOU to make it user friendly and more practical. Perhaps begin again

with a handshake and informal information exchanges. Faith agreed that everyone needs to be doing "best management practices" and it will benefit all. An incentive could be "flexibility in the numbers you are permitted to run" on an allotment. Wayne stated that the trust needs to be built and earned on both sides. He has always encouraged the ranchers to keep a diary of what you have done on your allotment each time you are there. Chuck agreed that relationships need to be built. Steve asked for clarification on what authority is used to continue to hold a grazing allotment as "vacant". Faith explained that the waiver is completed by the permittee only. Steve expressed concern is over non-use of the available feed, due to the waiver, but the FS is the "managing agency"? What is the difference between a "vacant" or "retired" grazing permit? Once there is no active permit, the allotment is considered vacant. Chuck responded that a permit that is waived with preference goes to that listed preferred user, but when it has no preference listed, it then goes back to the FS. Faith explained the permit can be re-issued under the "grant process", but it is rare. A current NEPA process is needed, and there cannot be any unresolved resource conflicts. There is a list of 7 priority orders of applicants that are considered; 1. Current permittees, or names listed on waiver, 2. Neighboring permittees, 3. 4. Etc. A new "young" applicant would be 6 or 7th in line. The NEPA process needs to be done to include the unused area as a "forage reserve" or issue the permit to a new user, depending on how it is worded. Steve's concern is about keeping the permit active and utilizing the resources, and he doesn't understand why the FS isn't actively marketing the vacant permits. Faith responded that the resource conflicts have to be considered on each individual allotment.

Faith addressed the difference between "suitability" and "capability" in grazing allotments. These word definitions have been flipped since the 1970's. The FS want each allotment to be considered on their individual merits. Capacity is not a result of capable acres, capacity is about management, not acres. For the most part the uplands grasses are not being used for grazing. Jim asked if off site water developments could be created to encourage the cattle to graze away from the creek bottoms. Josh has heard universal agreement that cattle need to be provided alternative water sources out of the creek bottoms. Faith sees that there is a lot of infrastructure that needs to be repaired. There are 1400 water developments that were built before 1980's and many need to be repaired. It is a concern that for good management of cattle many of the fences need to be rebuilt. The FS permits state the permittee is responsible for maintaining the improvements. Wayne asked what language is needed in the Forest Plan that will enable the maintenance to continue. Jim made the point that 60-year-old fences are not able to be maintained, they need to be rebuilt, and rebuilding is not a requirement of the permittee. Commissioner Randy Corgatelli suggested using solar water pumps to get the grazing animals dispersed into areas that aren't being used. New language in the forest plan needs to include all the tools available. Water development, placement of salt, fencing, and monitoring records. Steve asked if the FS would offer monitoring classes to permittee's, and Faith responded that they do. It was suggested the FS offer shared monitoring trips to the permittee, and open the relationship building process. Chuck asked how to incentivize the partnership relationship. Permittee does the maintenance, and goes to monitoring classes. Jim asked what they received in return, more AUM's, new improvement opportunities, or a longer grazing season? Local history shows only one allotment that was ever offered increased numbers, and it was turned down. Grass is a finite resource that the permittee needs to protect. We need to create the process to get those vacant allotments back into production, not creating fire hazards. Josh stated that a huge part of his job is translating such ideas into Forest Plan language. He can use objectives that we wish to achieve.

Faith turned the conversation to problems connected to "cheat grass". The 1960 range reports show cheat grass was here, but not in such quantity as now. Salmon/Challis National Forest wishes to be very pro-active in preventing its spread. She feels that soil disturbance is a prime mover of cheatgrass. Randy Corgatelli stated that "wildfire" is also a prime spreader of cheatgrass. The question is "how" do we encourage native forage grasses. Jim responded that cheat grass can be sprayed with Garlan 4 herbicide. You can graze cheat grass to remove it also, but it is an intensive process. It has also been observed that native grasses can exclude cheat grass as long as the native grasses are healthy. The forest plan language needs to help guide the preservation and health of native grasses. Josh suggested using "all management approaches" to fine tune the exclusion of cheat grass.

Josh expressed concern over the amount of money spent for fish mitigation, vs grazing infrastructure. The benefits of "off stream water sources" could be directly linked to fish mitigation and perhaps those funds could be utilized to the benefit of all. All agreed it was certainly worth looking into for funding.

The discussion turned to the words "cultural" and "social" and the vast differences between them. Jim expressed his understanding that "cultural" is the history of our society, and "social" is the current pressures on our society. Steve suggested by adding the word "trend" to these words, it gives a good definition. Faith expressed her struggle to maintain quality and availability of forage for all uses, when making suitability decisions on grazing allotments. It needs to be on an individual basis, rather than using a blanket approach. The FS is taking a much different look at how to manage the lands. They are wanting to use all the methods available to arrive at the resource values desired. Jim stressed that whenever the livestock and wildlife numbers are increasing, you are doing a good job of managing the quality of forage available, and reducing the catastrophic wildfires. Cattle are a great tool, and one that we have control over, to assist in getting the ecosystem healthy.

Gordon Fulton asked "have any vacant allotments gone through the "grant process" and been re-issued? Faith answered No, not on this forest. It has occurred two times that she is aware of on other forests. Most times the permit waiver is named with preference, and it is quite rare that they are turned back. Whenever an allotment is turned back with no preference, it was discussed that it "should" be re-issued. The FS looks at the work and cost involved in NEPA and getting them re-issued. Chuck said that they don't even get asked about. Steve stated that most ranches are not aware they are available, and they need to know about vacant permits. Jim asked if the NEPA process was the problem, and asked the FS to get it streamlined in the new Forest Plan wording.

Paul May asked about how many of the water trough/water holes are still useable? Faith answered that they really don't know, and the inventory process is moving slowly. Paul stated "In my area of Squaw Cr. I know that quite a few of the troughs are missing". The feed that is high on the mountain and away from accessible water, is not being utilized. The old dead grass is accumulating as fuel for wildfires, which many times result in cheat grass infestations. Per request, a list of the 19 vacant allotments will be made and given to the Commissioners. 15 of these permits went vacant before 2009. The reasons, year vacated, and type of grazing animal will be included with the list. The Commissioners also requested the "Grant Process" information. Harriet asked what would be needed to get the NEPA process streamlined? Chuck responded that no changes will be needed in the Forest Plan Revision to get the NEPA process streamlined.

Jim asked about dates available for the next G2G session, of which Timber will be the main topic. Wayne thanked Chuck and Josh for bringing the key people for each topic. He thanked Faith Ryan for coming and fielding the tough questions. Her experience and longevity is very important. Possible dates of Aug 5th, and Aug 12th will be looked at for the next Gov't to Gov't. Nick suggested Wild & Scenic Rivers be discussed in Mid-Sept. as the eligibility studies will be finished then. The Panther Cr. field trip is scheduled for Aug 16th. The eligibility team will be floating the Middle Fork for 4 days starting July 15th to review Rapid River, Marble Cr., Loon Cr., & Camas Cr. within the wilderness. The other topics still needing discussion were Species of Concern, and Wild and Scenic Rivers.

Jim reviewed that Faith will provide the data on vacant allotments, and the "grant process" information to the board. She will get the data for the entire forest, not just Custer County? Wayne thanked Chuck for the success of this meeting and a good exchange of information between the participants. This session was much less formal, and we are all enjoying better communication as this process is progressing. The meeting was adjourned at 8:58 PM.