

Custer County Commissioners
USFS – Roads
Special Meeting
June 10, 2025

The Special meeting with the Salmon/Challis National Forest Supervisor- Heather DeGeest was held at 10:00 AM with the Salmon Field Office staff. Attending were Commissioner Gordon Vaden, Commissioner Will Naillon, and Deputy Clerk Tina Hawkins representing Custer County. Heather DeGeest, Josh Milligan, Lance Stavast, Mike Carrol, Jeff Huntzman, Nick Shade, Tina Ruffing, Kira and Crystal and many other Forest Service employees were present.

The tour of the Salmon River Forest Products mill began with an introduction to Ron Parment the driving force behind the lumber portion of the mill. Ron then introduced Britt McFarland that is handling the post and pole portion of the mill. They originally began with posts and poles and have since branched out to produce studs, lumber and other products. This mill ships products nationwide as far away as Texas and North Dakota. The timber they primarily utilize is standing dead trees, either from beetle kill or fire. The mill can handle up to 48" logs. Any green logs they get are sent to Deer Lodge, Montana as this mill isn't set up for dry logs. Products they produce besides posts, poles, and studs includes planed lumber, pointed lath, bridge decking and beams, slab fencing, pet bedding/shavings, and they also provide pressure treated lumber by request. The mill is capable of producing 20,000 board feet of product per day. The main problem they have right now is getting enough crew hired. They need 30 employees to get the mill up to full production, and they would like to run two shifts when fully staffed.

Upon the conclusion of the awesome mill tour the group returned to the main conference room at the Salmon office. Commissioner Naillon asked if he could get the acreage of Wilderness that is contained within the Salmon/Challis National Forest. He needed the figures broke down by County and Nick Shade provided the numbers for him. Naillon will also get the acreage of Wilderness Study Areas that are overseen by the BLM within Custer County. These figures are needed for the PILT meeting that is coming soon. There are 617,675 acres of wilderness within Custer County.

Discussion was held on the issues connected to timber sales. Commissioner Naillon inquired about sale viability and how the USFS is able to get the timber product out to interested parties. Jeff Huntzman was able to explain the needs of the past versus the present needs and timber supply, which are very different. Heather DeGeest agreed with the group that it is in everyone's best interest that they keep selling timber from the forests. Commissioner Naillon offered to assist any way possible to keep this process going. Changing the old mind set from the belief that "short timber supply" is the problem, over to what actually is the problem, is the biggest hurdle for everyone to get past. The current drought conditions and a difficult fire season looming was then discussed. The USFS is using timber sales the best way they can to assist with fire control. Their goal is to complete 10,000 acres of fuel reduction per year as possible. All methods are being included with thinning, timber sales and prescribed burns.

The possibility of using chainsaw within the Wilderness for clearing trails was then discussed. Josh Milligan has not gotten any definite answer, but is aware that the conversation is being held. Heather updated the Commissioners on their summer trail crew shortage. They are unable to hire anyone, but are working with partners and volunteers as they can.

A printout with the requested "vacant grazing allotment numbers" was provided by Range Specialist Tina Ruffing. She explained the breakdown columns for animal types, dates of use and the remarks column. Copies were given to Custer County representatives.

Commissioner Naillon inquired about the "no commercial outfitting" areas that are within the Forest? These areas are set are primarily due to being very popular with the general public, and already getting heavy hunting pressure. There are many folks that do not want to compete with an outfitter, so the Forest has set aside such areas on their behalf.

All attending agreed that our meetings should be put on hold until fall, as the fire season could begin at any time and would be the priority.

Meeting adjourned at 1:15 PM.


Vice Chairman, Will Naillon



Attest: Clerk Lura Baker

