

## November 16, 2017 Lincoln County FireSafe Council Meeting Minutes

**Attendees; Jeff Stevenson and Dan Rose, USFS; Stewart Hall, West Kootenai FSA Chief; Ed Levert, Lincoln Co Forester; Louis Kuennen and Bill Swope, Flathead Economic Policy Center; Dawain Burgess, TFS and North end representative; Mike Sanders, Upper Yaak FSA; Steve Lauer, Libby RFD; Mark Peck, Lincoln Co. Commissioner; Trevor Pelling, McCormick RFD chief; Brent Teske, Lincoln County Emergency Management; Logan Sandman and Doug Turman, DNRC, Erik Warrington, DNRC(Missoula); Connie and Kipp Buegge, involved citizens McCormick RFD; Korbin Dub, Stimson Lumber; Kirk Kraft, Fisher River RFD chief; Jake Mertes, Lincoln County air quality**

### **Round Robin:**

**Rose and Stevenson-** The Kootenai N.F. is fully engaged in efforts to salvage trees affected by the 2017 fires. Currently the BAER assessment team is evaluating the needs of all resources from the fires. Finishing rehab from the fires. The congressional Christmas tree is on its way to DC.

**Hall-** Stewart explained ongoing efforts to rebuild home affected by the Caribou Fire. Ten homes are being rebuilt. Stewart said that there was mixed success from past FireWise efforts, mostly from the failure to remove enough trees.

**Kuennen-** Lou said he has written five new agreements and had five completions.

**Lauer-** They have been working on a storage tank at the airport. Big Horn annex is progressing. A grant for new turnouts was successful and they will have some surplus old gear. Steve will be talking at a fire meeting in Helena this weekend on the mutual aid agreement. Work is completing on a connector road between the Whiskey Hill fire station and the Farm to Market Road which will improve fire response times.

**Sandman-** DNRC completed fire rehab. Beginning slash pile burning. Need experienced tender cost rates for establishing new rates.

**Turman-** Idaho Forest Group is hauling 20 loads a day from their Flower Creek Sale. Should have 90% of the sale completed by Xmas. Clay Banks sale sold to IFG. Bobtail Sale is two years out. Fire Salvage efforts are ongoing for Moose Peak Fire and state section on the Caribou Fire.

**Pelling-** McCormick RFD is still working on establishing new water sources. They are still working on the conversion of the surplus truck they acquired in to a water tender. Trevor said they are still having radio reception problems in some areas.

**Swope-** Bill discussed grant situation in Lincoln, Flathead and Sanders County.

**Warrington-** Erik discussed the successful grants in Montana following the latest competition. Flathead and Lincoln Counties did not submit any applications this year.

**Dub-** We welcome Korbin who is a new forester with Stimson and stationed in Troy. Korbin said they were busy salvaging on their properties affected by the W. Quartz Fire.

**Teske-** Brent has now been on the job for three months. He has finished last year's grant applications. He will be organizing a fire coop meeting. Dawain mentioned that the small fire departments cannot afford to send their fire fighters for basic training since the Flathead training at Bull Lake will no longer be available.

**Kraft-** Kirk lamented the recent unexpected passing of a most valued member of the Fisher River RFD, Mike Rodgers. They are getting the finishing touches done at Montana Machinery on their new water tender. They had an active fire season and were not able to do any FireWise assessments, but hope to get on to that now.

**Peck-** Mark told us about his conversation with Patrick Holmes, Governor Bullock's natural resource policy advisor. Mark hopes to get some relief that would allow slash pile burning from November to April that could on occasion exceed the current smoke standards. Mark said that in January the county would be advertising for a new full time forester.

**Levert-** I attended the Montana Forest Collaborative Network annual gathering last week along with Commissioner Peck. I discussed the proposed Stimson Conservation Easement open house last week. I had also attended the American Forest Resource Council's meeting in Libby along with our commissioners, industry representatives and others.

### **New Business-**

#### **2018 Title III**

I presented the newly approved budget, which reduced the original proposal by \$24,000. I went through the proposal line by line. I mentioned the unknown value of the money we have been spending on advertisement and passed around a questionnaire and encouraged folks to make recommendations. This led to further discussions on information currently available on the county web site and the Lincoln County Firesafe Council site. The subject of Facebook came up and Logan said he would work with me to see what the benefits of going that route would be.

#### **Management Burns in the Libby Airshed**

Jake Mertes and Steve Lauer led the discussion on this topic. Can we have management burns(firewise, logging slash piles, etc.) outside of April and October? The current outdoor burning regulations allow such burns in November provided there is a written demonstration of need from a fire protection agency and approval from the department prior to each ignition. Steve proposed that each agency, USFS and DNRC identify their own fuel projects to the county, Libby RFD identify projects on private lands inside of

their fire district and the county forester designate projects that are on private lands outside the rural fire district.

## **2017 Fire Season(Lessons Learned)**

**Strategy and Tactics-** Dan Rose said that this fire season was the worst on the Kootenai N.F. in recorded history. Some of the past work was effective, however burning conditions were so extreme that it was hard to predict what was effective treatment.

Doug Turman discussed his fire assignments and the complexities of suppression. He related one story of a district ranger wanting to burn out an area and the team's success in going direct attack instead, thus saving many acres from burning. The shortage of manpower was a constant story.

Jeff said that on the Kootenai that their initial attack efforts were aggressive and successful thus reducing the fire impacts that could have been. The coordination on the W. Quartz fire was excellent. Mark said the Blue Team did an excellent job.

**Evacuations-** Brett Teske talked about the good coordination on the Gibraltar Fire including the local fire departments. The pre-evacuation notice on the Caribou Fire was a big help in alerting residents of the danger this fire posed. The refusals of residents to evacuate, particularly on the W. Quartz Fire were troubling.

**Coordination-** There was a major glitch in the mutual aid agreement on the Caribou Fire, because the word never got out to all available fire departments except through personal relation contacts. Part of this problem at the state level was that Brent Teske was not contacted and asked who needed help. Instead they called Steve Lauer, who said that he didn't need help in Libby.

**Kirk Kraft-** Kirk served as chief of the Fisher River RFD during the Moose Peak Fire. He also was instrumental in acquiring the Bulberry mapping system GIS for the county. Unfortunately the Google maps used in the system were not satisfactory as they had not been updated for several years and roads and some residences were not shown.

Kirk said animal evacuations during the fire spread were not fully expected and posed a challenge to get farm animals out. Coordination between the team, agencies, etc. was good.

**Dan Rose-** All teams stepped up and took on additional responsibility of managing multiple fires.

**Brent Teske-** Brent talked about the public informational meetings on the Caribou Fire. The first meeting went well, but the 2<sup>nd</sup> one became hostile. The number of phones now

on Code Red went from 3,000 before the fires to over 15,000. There are reverse 911 issues because some folks don't have a phone or are gone.

**Jeff Stevenson-** Jeff said there were equipment problems resulting from the VIPER contracting system. Mandatory use of the signups with VIPER before they could go to emergency sign ups.

**Steve Lauer-** Steve said there were some issues with the coordination for structure protection on the W. Quartz Fire. A discussion arose about the need for a mutual aid agreement with Lincoln Chute in Flathead County.

**Dan Rose-** Great local coordination.

In summary the consensus of our group was that the suppression efforts on all fronts were outstanding. Considering the complexities from this much activity there are going to be glitches, but important to remember was that there was no loss of life nor fire fighter fatalities.

**The meeting adjourned at 12:00.**

**Next Meeting- December 21, 9:00 AM**

Ed Levert, Chair

