

March 15, 2018 Lincoln County FireSafe Council Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Ed Levert, Lincoln Co Forester; Dawain Burgess, Mike Sanders, Upper Yaak FSA; Steve Lauer, Doug Turman, DNRC; Trevor Pelling McCormick RFD; Logan Sandman, DNRC; Tim Bumgardner; Brent Teske, Lincoln Co. DES; Lou Kuennen, Flathead Economic Policy Center; Dan Rose, USFS.

Round Robin:

Teske- A LEPC meeting was held with 17 in attendance. The objective of this group is to discuss potential emergency issues that might be found in the community. A table top exercise is planned.

The fire coop meeting was held on Feb 9th. Subjects discussed were the DNRC organization. Brent and Clyde Miller will be the mutual aid coordinators for the county.

Kuennen- Lou has one new sign up. He will send out the list of fuel reduction grant contracts and completions to all fire departments.

Bumgarner- Libby District has two new permanent fire positions filled. The West Fork Salvage Sale preparation is ongoing. Folks are attending training. Paige Hageness will be starting next week.

Pelling- McCormick had two call outs last month. McCormick FireWise Community planning is going well. A BBQ is planned in May along with a news journal. Trevor will start inventorying roads looking at fire evacuation issues. Their new tender has been brought back from Bend, OR. Fire personnel are doing wildland training and will have a refresher led by Logan Sandman.

Turman- Flower Creek and Clay Banks timber sales have stopped for the winter. They also have two salvage sales from the 2017 fire season to sell. They are Moose Peak and Island Lake. They are looking at filling the new Good Neighbor Authority position in May. Mike Justus retires the end of May.

Sandman- The Libby Unit will need a fire crew replacement next spring. The Lincoln County Operating Plan is being upgraded. He will be going to the WUI conference in Reno. Training dates have been identified for March and April. Bob Harrington's State Forester vacancy is planned for refilling in March. They are updating radios.

Sanders- Very quiet in the Yaak. They have three new firemen giving them ten in total.

Sandman- Their engine foreman will be back in May. They are in the process of filling their crew positions.

Rose- The forest's salvage sale projects are proceeding. The next result of the 2017 fire season will be the expected onslaught of mushroom pickers and their impact including the issuance of picking permits. The forest has filled 17 new fire positions. Their dispatch office will be fully staffed. Three River R.D. will not have a fire prevention person on staff, but will have a detailer here from the Southeast. The NW Zone will be meeting in Kalispell. There will be a Hands Across The Border meeting with Canadian fire officials following the Caribou Fire. The coordination went well last summer.

Levert- I have been working on getting the Firewise questionnaire summarized. I have been working with McCormick residents on forming a Firewise Community.

I met yesterday with the commissioners and DNRC personnel via conference phone to discuss creating a new county forester position vice myself. It appears that there is adequate funding from several sources for a full time position.

The state Society of American conference in Whitefish will be on April 13th and 14th. The theme is "Flames, Fuels and Funding". This should be an excellent opportunity for people interested in fire to increase their knowledge. I will be sending out the announcement shortly. On Saturday the 14th there will be a field trip to look at fuels treatment and other fire issues in the Whitefish area.

New Business

Firewise Questionnaire-

I will try and catch the gist of the comments made on the summary of the questionnaire as we went through them point by point. Our overall objective with this effort is to try and target our message to our county residents in the most efficient manner possible. Often times all we can do is speculate on what the answers to the questionnaire indicate. This effort is going to take more work in order to give us a more clear picture of our next steps.

"What does the term Firewise mean to you?" 78% understood the term, but 22% didn't. Although most folks in the county understand the term to some extent, I found it hard to understand that after 15 years there were still that many that did not. Erik Warrington's take is that Firewise USA is suggesting not to use this term? We wondered what they might replace the term with. Is Firesafe more recognizable than Firewise? Do we want to further confuse folks with our terminology?

"Are you comfortable with how well your home and property is prepared for a wildfire?" 42% said they were, 15% said they were not and 43% said somewhat. We

all agreed that the figures reflect a much more uncomfortable situation for a large majority of home and property owners. Not much we can do with that one, but to have professional firemen do home assessments with follow up treatments when needed.

“What actions have you taken to reduce the impact of wildfire”? 5% said fuels cleanup; 3% pruning; 2% gutter cleanup; 2% firewood removal; 5% nothing and 83% multiple things. None of this tells us much of anything as the question and answer is so subjective.

“Are you aware of the Lincoln County Firesafe Council’s web site www.lcfiresafe.com”? 19% said they were aware of it and 81% said they were not. This situation seems to have many opportunities for improvement. We must keep the website current and valuable, but that doesn’t really explain why folks aren’t even aware of it. Another suggestion was putting the questionnaire on our website and allowing them to take the survey. Brent wasn’t aware of the site and he suggested ways to link with the county EMS site. Another suggestion was linking to the Libby Chamber of Commerce website.

“Have you read the Firewise advertisements that run in the county newspapers?” 32% said they were and 68% said they were not. This is one of our larger expenses running \$3,000-\$5,000 per year. This year’s budget was for \$3,000. As Warrington points out this is mass marketing and not targeted marketing. I felt that at least we were reaching those folks that subscribed to a newspaper. There were probably a greater percentage of residents who are not in the WUI who get a newspaper and are aware of our messages and that isn’t all bad.

“Have you viewed Firewise messages on the TV?” 16% said they had and 84% had not. Questions raised were, how many residents in the WUI had a TV. With at least Dish Network not allowing Lincoln County residents to receive local programming we won’t reach many of those folks with the ads. Someone mentioned that this may be the reason that local stations don’t cover fire events much in Lincoln County.

I mentioned that I had not mentioned radio in the questionnaire because I thought it had such a small coverage in the WUI areas. I did do radio ads in Libby and the Eureka area last summer. Some of the messages were targeted toward town residences who although outside the WUI are still at risk as pointed out by some of the California fires that blew through housing units.

“Are you aware of the financial assistance programs available to help reduce your fire risk around your home and property?” 27% said they were and 73% said they were not. Our discussion included the need to get out more signs near visible projects. We

have been doing that, but obviously this isn't enough. Many of our newspaper ads promote grant opportunities.

“If so, have you taken advantage of these financial assistance programs?” 21% of the respondents said they had and 79% had not. This probably isn't a bad percentage if on 27% said they were even aware of the program.

“Do you actively participate in Facebook, Twitter or other social media?” 18% said they did and 82% did not. This surprised all of us and probably reflects the older age of residents who just don't communicate that way. Logan suggested ways to use social media such as a Facebook site to reach those folks that do.

“Were you affected by 2017 forest fires?” 29% said they were directly affected though evacuation or health implications. 43% said they were not affected and 28% complained about the smoke. About all this tells us is that now is probably a teachable moment.

“What sort of help do you need to make your home and property safe from a forest fire?” 19%-thin and prune; 7% create safe space for firefighters; 4% replace roof or siding; 24% multiple needs. 46% of respondents either did not need any help or didn't know what they needed. All this shows is that there is a lot of need for work.

“Would you like a free Firewise assessment of your home and or property?” 43% said they would and 61% said they did not. They were then asked **“if yes, please provide your name and a telephone number”**. We received 45 names and numbers which I thought was outstanding. Erik had suggested giving 5 paid return-mail postcard which request an assessment and ask them to be personal ambassadors to their neighbors.

“Have you signed up with the county's Code Red alert system?” 17% said they had and 83% had not. This is a significant result and shows the need for folks to sign up. I could have also given instructions on the questionnaire on this as to how to sign up.

Summary-

1) Improve the questionnaire and send it out to the remaining 1,000 residences in the WUI. Use the questionnaire more as a teaching tool, including more information about are website and how to sign up for Code Red. This should generate many additional names for Firewise assessments.

2) Continue to judiciously use our newspapers as an avenue for reaching residents. Some may question this recommendation, but I believe that is a valuable tool.

- 3) Investigate why Montana TV stations are not available on satellite TV in Lincoln County??
- 4) Put a greater emphasis on the Firewise Community program. This program has great potential to empower local citizens to promote the Firewise program.
- 5) Set up a Facebook site.
- 6) Set up the questionnaire on our website. In addition track the number of hits to determine effectiveness of the website.
- 7) Consider a “rewards” program for citizens who are able to recruit neighbors to sign up for Firewise assessments??
- 8) ????????

Next Meeting- April 19, 2018 9:00 AM

Ed Levert, Chair

