

National Forest Advisory Board (NFAB) Meeting

February 20, 2008 – 3:20 p.m.
Journey Museum, Rapid City, SD

Members Present:

Tom Blair, Chair; Jim Heinert, Hugh Thompson, Everett Hoyt, Bob Paulson, Becci Jo Rowe, Matt Hoobler, Donovin Sprague, Nancy Kile, Aaron Everett and Nels Smith.

Forest Service Representatives:

Craig Bobzien, Dennis Jaeger, Frank Carroll, Craig Kjar, Bob Thompson, Mike Lloyd, Rhonda O'Byrne, Ed Fischer, Twila Morris - Recorder.

Others:

Approximately ten members of the public, and three congressional representatives; Chris Blair, Mark Haugen, and Rick Hanson, were in attendance.

Members Absent:

Jim Scherrer, Mac McCracken, Doug Hofer, Pat McElgunn

Welcome and Roll Call:

Chair Blair: Quorum present, called the meeting to order at 3:20 p.m. Welcome everyone; please turn off your cell phones.

Comments to the Chair:

Bobzien: I hope that Dr. Foster and Dr. Joyce were able to give you some new information on climate change, it is so broad, and there are so many things on the table. The first thing for me is understanding and awareness, which is the purpose of the presentation today.

Smith: I was impressed with Dr. Joyce, the longer she talked the better she got.

Blair: What a volume of material, I hope we can take some of our understanding from this and try to apply here locally.

Smith: Can we get a print out of her presentation?

Carroll: I'll send you a copy Nels. All of the presentations are on the internet, just go to Google News, and type in RMRS; it will bring up everything you want.

Approve January Minutes

Blair: Are there any changes to the January minutes? If there are not, the minutes stand as reported.

Approve Agenda

Blair: Are there any changes to the agenda?

Heinert: Motion to approve.

Blair: The agenda stands as presented.

Housekeeping:

Carroll: Restrooms are down the hall to the right. Thanks to the Journey Museum for hosting us, and the Boxelder Job Corps for the treats as always.

HOT TOPICS

Chair Blair: It's been a month and a half since we've met; biomass has been a hot topic since we dropped off the edge of the page in the energy bill. Craig alluded to some attempts to bring that back into the farm bill or some other legislation.

Carroll: Representative Herseth Sandlin and Senator Thune had introduced some legislation to try to make that amendment.

Mark Hagen: There is a version of that in the farm bill, and the hope is that it won't be pulled out as it was in the energy provision.

Hoyt: What is the importance of the legislation to the Forest Service?

Bobzien: To include biomass from the National Forest as some of the source being considered for renewable energy, this would define their role, talking about the residue from the forest. Certain versions of the legislation had sideboards.

Blair: We had a good meeting out at the visitor center with Representative Herseth Sandlin. We had people here from industry, the Forest Service, and businesses. We talked pointedly about biomass issues, and the Farm Bill. We listened to some reports from the company doing celluloid ethanol; Baker Timber Products and we were all able to give input.

I would like to recognize Jim Margadent who is in the audience today. Jim was a member of the Board for four years and a valuable representative. Jim was also at the visitor center, and we talked a lot about the direction the Black Hills National Forest needs to move to. There are concerns on the industry side, and the conservation side. Subsequently Herseth Sandlin Has put in some legislation that I believe was influenced by this meeting.

Smith: How close do you think they are to having some practical processes in place? It would be great if they can make it work, but how close is it?

Blair: They are producing ethanol, not a gigantic amount, but it appears they are moving forward.

Everett: They are still working on production delays, working with the process, getting equipment in place. They are behind schedule based on their first estimations.

Blair: Any other questions on the biomass topic?

Open Space Strategy

Blair: The open space letter has been sent to the six delegations. It was my misunderstanding that the letter had to be sent from the Board, not from the Forest Service. Because of changes we are suggesting, the Forest Service is prohibited from sending such a letter. The letters have been sent to the delegations from Wyoming and South Dakota with copies to Craig Bobzien and Rick Cables.

Heinert: Was the letter sent from you individually or from the Board?

Blair: It was sent from me as the Chairman.

Hoobler: Have you gotten any response?

Blair: Haven't heard anything yet.

Paulson: I'm passing out a new publication from the Forest Service; it's the last publication on the chief's four threats. We are hoping to expand on this strategy.

Carroll: We would like to have Craig Kjar give us an update on Open Space.

Kjar: Like Bob said, we just passed out the National publication on the Forest Service open space conservation strategy. There are four main priorities spelled out in the publication: 1) Convene partners to identify and protect priority open space, 2) Promote national policies and markets to help private landowners conserve open space, 3) Provide resources and tools to help communities expand and connect open spaces, and 4) Participate in community growth planning to reduce ecological impacts and wildfire risks. These all fit into the work we've done on the Black Hills. We've also made efforts recently to try to share some work with other Forests. We're working internally as far as what we'll do if we get the authority the Board has requested.

Blair: Any other questions on the open space topic?

In the News – Fuels Treatments; Update on Current Progress and Projects.

Carroll: In the last several weeks and months, we've been doing prescribed burning, and we've had some discussion here today of the smoke. The other night, the cloud cover was low and the piles were burning brightly, it looked like they were out of control, so we received numerous calls about that. We are burning, and that has been in the news, if there are any questions, our Rangers can tell you more.

Other News

Bobzien: I'm sad to say that this is Aaron's last Board meeting. Aaron will be going to work for the Washington Department of Natural Resources March 3rd. We will miss Aaron's work behind the scenes. When I first came to the Black Hills, we were in the thick of Phase Two planning and Aaron helped facilitate that. Also, with biomass, Aaron has always been very current with all the courses of interest. Thank you Aaron on behalf of all of us, you have served the Board well and the Forest Service also.

Blair: We started out in the fall of 2002, and got seated in 2003. Aaron is one of those charter members. I didn't know beans about the Forest, but Aaron has really been the person that has taken the uninformed and taught us about the timber industry. This Board will always be indebted to you Aaron, thank you.

Everett: It has been my pleasure to work with you.

Hoobler: What is your new job?

Everett: The State of Washington would like some help to encourage the Forest Service to take care of some of their forest health issues. They have similar issues, bark beetles, etc. that we do.

REGULAR AGENDA

Travel Planning Update – Current Status, Funding, Timeline

Blair: At our last meeting, we had just heard that day, that we were going to have some struggles with the potential OHV legislation, that we had worked on as the Governors Task Force. There were some doubts that we would see the legislation dropped in the hopper. That was the Governor's call. It appears that it is not going to happen, we still have a week and a half left, but there hasn't been a lot of conversation about it. There have been other attempts to classify things we have talked about. On the new the other day, there are smaller cars that still fall under the ATV category; they were trying to reclassify those as to what they are, for licensing, safety, etc. As far as the OHV, that is a piece of legislation that will be delayed till the following year.

It doesn't slow down the time frame we have in front of us that came from the Washington office, which says that we will have rules on the ground and a working plan for 2009. That is a year away. With that we have a pretty good plan in place, and the only thing we have yet to really put the pencil to is the funding mechanism. With that in mind, and not to belabor the money issue, those plans do not run very well without a funding mechanism. If Craig had the kind of budget we wish for, he could fund it, but he does not, so we need to develop a funding mechanism with the idea that we might dove tail into the State legislature at some point. I'm very disappointed; we've worked on it for four years. We spent hundreds of hours, but I still believe that we will see the program go forward.

Bobzien: We do have an update on the alternatives we have developed. Our FLT has been meeting every week. This is clearly a Forest priority for our planning for the future of motorized use. We are, as Tom said, going to have to have a business plan that is realistic in terms of our capability and ability in terms regarding education, maintenance, enforcement, operation, and rehabilitation.

We'll put our best efforts into appropriated funding, partnerships, but in short we're asking the Board for help with a business plan that will mesh our financial capabilities to do an ongoing job of managing the system. We have some holes. Wyoming has a strategy in place that will serve us well, in terms of funding some things. Their registration system can be used as a guide. We have to develop an alternative system. I'm asking you as the Board to help design a task force to help us decide what the best way is to go about this, in a responsible way. The ability and capability to manage the system will influence the decision I make this fall.

Blair: This should be a small group that addresses this issue. The Board has passed on recommendations to Rick Cables and the Washington office in the past. We need to define a strategy. I truly believe that there will be legislation passed in the State; maybe this just wasn't the right year. For this Task Force, I will take people that were on the subcommittee: Becci Jo Rowe, Bob Thompson, Scott Carbonneau, Jim Scherrer, and Greg Mumm. We want to keep the State involved because of the future dovetail possibility. I would hope that we could meet prior to the Board meeting again in March, and maybe within a couple meetings we'll have a recommendation for the Forest to look at, and enhance if need be. We'll send them on towards the end of spring, for recommendation to our counterparts in Denver.

Paulson: Could you tell us the names again, and the reasoning for choosing them?

Blair: It would be all the people on the original Sub-Committee; Beeci Jo Rowe, Bob Thompson, Scott Carbonneau, Jim Scherrer, and Greg Mumm. This way, we'll have people from all areas, from the Forest Service, from the Board, and from outside areas.

Everett: Do I understand correctly, that the Sub-Committee will develop recommendations that will serve as a contingency plan incase the legislation does not get approved.

Blair: I see it as two fold, the first part being what gets us initially funded and secondly, the idea that the funding source may have to be in place for one to two years as a bridge plan, and continued out if need be. We're not going to be able to fund at the level we would have with a joint effort with the State. Also with the idea that we could expand in the second year if there is still no workable legislation.

Everett: Will it be a matter of setting priorities of what activities get funded and when?

Blair: Yes, we'll have to prioritize the different aspects such as the mapping system, signing, education, rehabilitation. A bunch of extra law enforcement might have to be the initial priority.

Bobzien: I will give you this in writing. I would ask for the best business model for success over the long term, not simply a bridge plan. If the ability is there for dovetailing, that will be fine, but I don't want to preclude a long term plan over a bridge plan, not knowing where the legislation is going to go. The second piece is, if we have a component that has any kinds of fees, you are the Board that will be making the recommendation on that. I support the smaller Task Force concept, because it is easier to handle meetings, etc., but it will come back to the full Board for recommendation. The Board is the designated entity for any fee recommendations.

Blair: In your letter, please include what we can do as far as stickers, and those kinds of things. Is a \$20 dollar sticker enough; is a \$40 dollar sticker too much? What is the mechanism on how we do that? The sticker system through the State would be different than one through the Black Hills National Forest.

Bobzien: Rick Hudson is our expert on the Forest. We'll be faced with this everywhere in the US.

Paulson: If this is going to dovetail into future legislation, maybe Doug Hofer should be on the Sub-Committee.

Blair: That's why we have Scott. Doug will be tied up, we would be more than happy to include his comments, but we hope we have an initial meeting prior to the March NFAB meeting, and I know what Doug's schedule is. Honestly, stranger things have happened, this thing may get introduced and suddenly appears to be doable. Scott works for Doug, and Scott is really the numbers guru in that office. I will ask Doug to send us what his preliminary ideas are. We've talked about budget, and some of the things we need from him are numbers from him such as how many registered ATV's, there are etc.

Everett: I believe it would be awkward for the Forest Service from an environmental analysis stand point to question future legislation.

Blair: We're going to lose the two legislative people that worked on the Governor's Task Force.

Everett: I think it would be good for the Governor to formally endorse this, and throw the States official policy weight behind the policy he endorses. There is a clause of the NEPA that requires that Forest Service to coordinate with the State. In order to tier meaningfully, I believe it would be beneficial for Doug to convince the Governor to do that.

Bobzien: You named Bob Thompson for the Task Force, we will provide a lot of resources, but I would like to substitute Steve Kozel for Bob. Steve was on the committee originally.

Blair: When is our March meeting?

Carroll: The 19th.

Carroll: I would like to give you a brief update on where the Travel Management Team is at. The board has been involved with this since the very first day we went on a summer field tour with Bob Thompson that sent us down the road of travel management on the Black Hills. We went through our public involvement, had four meetings in September which 700 people attended. We've also received written comments from about 700 people. In the last four weeks, we've been going through an astonishing process. As we went through this, we went over each District mile by mile, often a few hundred yards at a time. Bob Thompson stated that this has been one of the most valuable processes we've been through on the Forest in terms of resource management. We've went District by District to develop the framework for management, it was a great exercise. What we are doing now is edge matching, District by District. Also we have developed the framework for the alternatives, and then we'll look at what they actually are.

We are diligently working to publish the draft EIS by spring, with a comment period to follow. At that point people will see the amount of work that went into this process; it was hugely facilitated by this Board. We've sat down with 13 pages and 1200 general comments and went route by route to look at a range of alternatives. Everyone will agree that the range is reasonable, and shows the public and the decision maker a good range to look at. We expect a decision in September, and we'll publish a map in January, we're still on target. I would like the Board to hear briefly from each Ranger about what their District has gone through.

Lloyd: It was an interesting process, we had most of the District staff there, we went through everyone's concerns, and it's pretty safe to say every issue was considered.

B. Thompson: We also had many of our resource folks at the meetings, and as Frank said we went through inch by inch. We spend five days on the Mystic district. We did our best to reflect what we've heard from folks. We didn't try to integrate much on our own; we were truly trying to reflect what we heard from folks. This will be evident in the range of alternatives.

O'Byrne: It was interesting, and the better experience was of team dynamics and interaction, the team was learning. One specific item of concern on the Northern Hills was gateway communities and jump offs onto the forest. We visited the county Commissioners, but there will be other partners. We invited input in trying to develop the alternatives and looking at our comments. There were some local entities that grabbed the invitation, and ran with it. Lawrence County was one of the Counties that grabbed it and ran. They put together a committee, they submitted comments, and they came up with a trail system, and how it could tie in with the Forest Service, they really got involved. We've also had a business owner come up with a proposal, and other businesses that presented us with – just make sure they can leave from my business. We have to work through the Forest Service jurisdiction vs. what the local government wants.

Carroll: It will be apparent when the draft is released, and people see the political implications. It will be quite clear.

O'Byrne: Most of the Lead & Deadwood area is in the exemption area, with a mix of land ownership such as BLM, State, etc.

H. Thompson: Why is it exempt?

Blair: The exemption area, although there are public lands within, BLM, etc., we don't have much Forest Service land in there. I went to three meetings at Lead, over their concerns that it was hard to get from Point A to Point B. They are proactive; tourism is an astounding economical engine, they took the bull by the horns, from their stand point, it will happen. Others may have to be dragged to the table, but they wanted to figure it out themselves. Understanding we weren't going to get a lot of new trails, the Counties must take the lead.

B. Thompson: I've been speaking with the community of Hill City. One of the local businesses, the KOA is looking at how he could tie the KOA into the community of Hill City and on into the west. I've been honest with Hill City, it can be contentious, and they need to be informed and understand. They need to decide, do they want to have ATVs dirt bikes, etc. into town, on the edge, a mile away? I'm confident that the community of Hill City wants to be able to draw tourists as a jumping off point. We are interested in what the community has to say, we don't want to cause problems, they need to engage, not just react when something comes up.

Carroll: If you look at Hill City, what Bob is doing is right in line with what we've asked the County Commissioners to do, be proactive. At the same time, the State of South Dakota is looking at connecting the Mickelson Trail to Mount Rushmore. What are the trade offs? What do the communities want to see, how does that work; it becomes a local leadership thing, whether it's motorized or not. These are telling examples, and I will look to them for the nod, because they represent the neighborhoods, and constituents. We won't say we're going to put something out there that won't work for the community. It has to be good for the Forest and community.

Paulson: To tie the two together, the alternatives and range of alternatives, how does funding factor into the analysis?

Bobzien: It clearly has a part in terms of our capability.

Paulson: How will it be integrated; the alternatives and the funding?

Bobzien: We're going to have alternatives that we have the capability to implement. We won't do an EIS every year. As Bob illustrated, whether there is a motorized trail, right off the forest or somewhere else. We're not going to build things that won't work. We'll refine, and put those in the draft EIS.

Public Comments ~ Chairman Blair

Chair Blair: If anyone from the public wishes to address the Board, please do so.

Blair: For those of you who are on the Task Force, do you want to meet right before the next NFAB meeting, or a day before, when? I'll be gone the first two weeks of March.

Carroll: We will provide you a copy of what Wyoming has in place and all the rest of the documentation we have.

Blair: When Rhonda was showing us the map, not everything stays the same. We haven't had a good snowmobile year for several years, but this year *you can't swing a dead cat in the air without hitting a snowmobile!*

One of the staging areas over by Recreation Springs suddenly lost their ability to dovetail into the trail system because of the portion on private land. The land owner sold their land, and the new owners didn't want traffic; it has been a real problem. We first heard about it about the time we started with the OHV Task Force. When private ground and easements go away, they're gone; we encourage people to be involved.

Adjournment:

Chair Blair: If there is no other business to come before the Board, I will ask for a motion to adjourn.

Motion made by Nels Smith and seconded by Aaron Everett. Meeting adjourned at 4:25 p.m.

2008 Meeting Dates:

March 19

April 16

May 21

June 18

July – No Meeting

August 20 – Field Trip

September 17

October 15

November 19

December – No Meeting

January 6, 2009 - Tentative