

National Forest Advisory Board (NFAB) Meeting
September 17, 2008 – 1:00 p.m.
Forest Service Center, 8221 South Highway 16, Rapid City, SD

Members Present:

Tom Blair, Chairman; Mac McCracken, Nancy Kile, Steve Sisk, Everett Hoyt, Colin Paterson, Donovan Sprague, Pat McElgunn, Sam Brannan, Jim Scherrer, Nels Smith, and Bill Kohlbrand.

Forest Service Representatives:

Craig Bobzien, Dennis Jaeger, Dave Thom, Mike Lloyd, Rusty Wilder, and Twila Morris - Recorder

Others:

Approximately 10 members of the public, and three congressional representatives; Chris Blair (Johnson – D, SD), Mark Haugen (Thune – R, SD), and Rick Hanson (Herseth Sandlin – D, SD), were in attendance.

Members Absent:

Jim Heinert, Becci Jo Rowe, Bob Paulson, Hugh Thompson, Tom Troxel, and Doug Hofer

Welcome and Roll Call:

Chair Blair: Quorum present, called the meeting to order at 1:07 p.m. Welcome everyone; please turn off your cell phones.

Approve April Minutes:

Blair: Are there any changes to the July minutes? Hearing no corrections, the minutes stand as reported.

Approve Agenda

Blair: Are there any changes to the agenda?

Motion to approve made by Jim Scherrer, motion second by Sam Brannan.

Blair: The agenda stands as presented.

Housekeeping:

Jaeger: Directions around building given, exits, etc. Thanks to the Boxelder Job Corps Center for the treats.

Meeting Protocols – Issues:

Blair: Nothing new to discuss.

HOT TOPICS

Report on August NFAB Field Trip

Chair Blair: Field trip was excellent. Appreciate the time and effort that is spent to line up drivers, food, etc. If you haven't been on one of these trips you are really missing out.

Jaeger: We really appreciate your time to participate in this field trip.

Fire Transfer – Local Implications

Bobzien: Nationally the Forest Service had to come up with 400 million dollars. Our share on the Black Hills was just under two million dollars. We had to prioritize all of our projects. We only went forward with projects that involved health and safety & insect control.

The total withdrawn from the Black Hills for the agency fire transfer was \$1,830,000. Withdrawals were made from the following programs:

- National Forest Systems: \$633,000
- Capital Improvements and Maintenance: \$611,000
- Hazardous Fuels Reduction and Fire Preparedness: \$326,000
- Other (LALW and PEP2): \$260,000

Deferred projects included:

- \$125,000 for campground facility upgrades
- \$249,000 for botany and heritage surveys needed for travel management planning
- \$273,000 for road maintenance and gravel crushing
- \$45,000 for timber marking
- \$56,000 for stand exams
- \$220,000 for fuels reduction in a storm damaged area

Travel Plan: We are on schedule to release the draft EIS this fall, in doing this we have some additional work before we go out with the final. We are in a challenging situation because we have high expectations to meet because of the Boards recommendations, and the publics input. We have to do a good job of environmental planning. The Task Force is helping us work on making it happen once the draft is out. We're still looking at delays in terms of months, not years.

Initial Budget for Healthy Forest Program: We were over 70,000 acres last year. On our FY09 budget we'll be down to about 50,000 acres. **The timber industry:** This year 240,000 CCF, our start for next year is 114,000 CCF. Based on this reduction there will be a huge impact on the whole timber industry. This infrastructure is a big part of the Black Hills National Forest being able to manage the forest. We stand on our record that we have the environmental way we process timber, but with the budget, we won't be able to sustain this, and when people drop out of that industry, we will no longer be able to succeed. We do think it will get better, but we do not know to what scale.

Blair: Fiscal year is just about over? There has been no ability to move the money to the next fiscal year?

Bobzien: In terms of carryover, from one year to the next, it would be hard to track, and would pale in comparison to our needs.

Jaeger: Two million dollars lost, projects put on hold. We'll have a reduced budget, so we'll have to prioritize.

Blair: Last month on the field trip, you said we were well ahead of the ball as far as work on the ground, so what we lost was less than what we could have.

Paterson: What do you anticipate in terms of the travel management getting on the ground and running?

Bobzien: Draft in November, additional survey work deferred, draft EIS to determine scale and ability to examine all the things from the public, we may not be able to examine everything. I don't want to wait two to four years till we get funding, I just need to make a decision. We'll evaluate, and it will just be a matter of months till we have a final.

Paterson: April? June?

Bobzien: Late spring, early summer, what we have in response to the draft, will be our gage. The draft is our tool to say this is what we have right now, and we'll get public input.

Paterson: The issue this spring and summer was the wet season. Travel on the Forest created bogs in many areas. My concern is the unauthorized trails that are being developed. What measures can be taken to prevent this, and protect the Forest?

Bobzien: We always have the provision for emergency closure. If you look at this last year, we got a lot of good media coverage, and that is a form of education. Beyond that – can we declare the forest closed, no that's not possible. There's always going to be a few people that will create damage.

Kohlbrand: What is the drastic drop in timber attributed to?

Bobzien: Just a matter of the whole compression of the Forest Service budget. 52% of the budget is what we have outside of fire (48%). It's a result of the whole situation. Short of having a mechanism to fund the mega fires, we'll see that kind of compression.

Kohlbrand: Are you still keying on the beetle areas?

Bobzien: Yes, we're prioritizing to be in the best place we can be.

Hoyt: With so much going on such as compression as a result of fire, and Iraq, it would appear that the Forest Service, in its budget process could have their statisticians work out the probabilities at the National level, so that the Forest isn't put in this position every year. Why isn't something done?

Bobzien: Our Regional Forester, Rick Cables, met with the Chief on this very issue, and met with the delegations from WY, CO, and SD, so they are very much aware of what we have just talked about. But they are still saying yes – but... It may change because of the election year.

Hoyt: These are difficult financial times, all through out the Federal Government.

Blair: An example is the agriculture industry - drought has not been treated with the importance of a Katrina, etc. The Forest Service is now facing the same thing. The mentality in DC will have to change in order for them to look at those fires, in a FEMA type of operation, like a hurricane. Otherwise we will continue to have to lose the budgets in the prime time of the year. We can't stop talking to our congressional representatives. Mother Nature won't stop growing 180 MBF in the Black Hills. The fact is, we'll still have more trees

growing, and we won't be able to thin as well, control the bugs as well.

Hoyt: My point was not more money, the people in DC, or delegations. It's the budgeting process within the Forest Service. If X dollars is all you'll get, then Y percent should be the contingency.

Blair: But if you lose the money at the end of the year because of an event elsewhere. Someone needs to step up; maybe the contingency fund is like the FEMA fund is.

Hoyt: In the private sector there are times when you have to cut back, it's a different budget system.

Sisk: Any contingency fund is viewed by the elected officials as a slush fund. I've seen it happen. That's a fear of any agency that someone will grab it.

Bobzien: We'll continue to do our best on our priorities. Some good news that will affect how we do business is our read on the new Farm Bill. It has gone into areas of conservation that it hasn't been before, relating to our fuels conditions, Native Americans being involved with biomass and the use of traditional products, etc. It also opens some very interesting doors in terms of alternative energy, biomass, working with states and tribes. It's a growth area. We'll look at this as it unfolds. It has some titles that will open some doors on how we work with communities of interest. Titles are friendly towards forest conservation.

Bobzien: The next topic I would like to discuss is the Business Plan Task Force for the OHV trail system. We're planning one more face to face meeting, targeting an October presentation back to the Board. I will not be at the October meeting, but Dennis will cover the meeting. The Task Force has had good discussions, and they should be ready by October, with further deliberations in November.

Blair: Have you heard form the National level on the possibility of delaying the implementation of the OHV rule in light of the budget constraints?

Bobzien: I've heard rumors, but no direction on it.

Bobzien: Business task force, meeting scheduled this month. October and November schedule: Overview of the range program, and a new report on the scope of our pine beetle problem. Two projects we want to bring back, is the rattlesnake project, which includes the sand creek area, and the Norbeck project which we've been working on with Mount Rushmore, and the Park. Also, the insect condition, we don't have the surveys out, but the redness in the tress has been delayed because of the moisture. First and foremost we'll ask for your advice on travel planning and specifically a recommendation from the Board in its capacity as the Recreation Resource Advisory Committee on Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, special recreation permit fees.

Paterson: Will the Board be informed of the time and date of the next Task Force meeting?

Bobzien: Yes, we will inform the Board.

Blair: Let's try to get a date set while we are here today. We are close to numbers, rules, and money. We need to get the numbers tied down, so we can go to DC.

Bobzien: Tom asked me about Meeker Ranch. The acquisition was facilitated by Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation in 2004 & 2005. Last December there was interest in doing some historical preservation on the site. There are also other sites, such as the Gold Hill Mine that folks are interested in. The group has formed a historic non profit group; we've met with the folks on a number of occasions. They are going to work together to see what they can do in terms of historic preservation. They'll determine where they could invest in the long term on properties for the enjoyment of people, and history. The coverage was on meeker, but it's bigger than

that. We get minimal funding to do much of anything like this.

Hoyt: I'm encouraged to see that both of the groups are forming and the Forest Service is cooperating. There are those that are unique and if the private sector can step up with funding, it is a win-win situation. As a follow up to the travel management situation, are there ongoing discussion with State Legislators, Governors, as it relates to OHVs and their participation in the system? It's time to get the bills ready.

Bobzien: The Governor's Task Force addressed the areas of comprehensive OHV legislation, and that was delivered 11 months ago.

Blair: We worked for six or eight meetings, and worked on all the facets, made the recommendation, and sent it in. I believe that is where it still sits. Without the Governors support, we're DOA on trying to do it ourselves. It would be inappropriate for this Board to do anything.

McCracken: I concur with Tom.

Hoyt: Aren't there funding mechanisms that can be developed without State participation?

Blair: That's what we are working on, and it will be coming in October. We would all like the State to become partner on this, but we are under a Federal mandate to make this happen. If something in 09 or 10 comes forward that is great, but I don't hold out hope.

Paterson: My understanding is the OHV Task Force was to set up legislation that would set up funding.

Blair: The Governor's Task Force was for that, yes. Anything to do with this Board does not include developing legislation. It sits at the Governor's office.

Paterson: Independent of any funding from the State, the Task Force's recommendation would be for Federal land only, correct?

Scherrer: The second OHV Task Force recommended that we take it to the State. The Governor made it a State wide issue. The second Task Force had people form the State and we took that as an opportunity to take it to the next level. Bottom line, it was a waste of time, so we're back to doing it ourselves on the Forest. When we get it done, it will be a foundational product, but the product will be a quality product, it will sell itself, and grow itself. I wouldn't be surprised if the folks from the eastern part of the state jump on board. The two drivers of our project have been people from opposite sides; Becci Jo Rowe, and Greg Mumm. These two folks have been working with spreadsheets, so that we can see what we're getting into. We have to know that what we are putting together will pay for itself. Don't expect to have the gold plated, state of the art; 6,000 miles of trails, there is no money for that. What we will have will be a sustainable project with estimates of the cost and revenues, and opportunities for us to stand back and evaluate. We'll be conservative but accurate, and that is what we'll ask the board to carry forward.

Paterson: What extent of the funds being budgeted by the Forest Service is being set aside for trail rehabilitation?

Scherrer: The answer is yes, it is being considered. When we come back in with the spreadsheets, and the explanations – the question will be relevant.

Blair: Break 1:58 – 2:10

REGULAR AGENDA

Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station:

- **The state of scientific inquiry in the Black Hills.**
- **What are FS scientists looking at, why, and what have they found?**
 - **Jasper Fire**
 - **Aspen Studies**
 - **Forest Disturbance**
 - **Insects and Management**
 - **Wildlife**
 - **Invasives – flora & fauna**
 - **More**

Bobzien: Our regular agenda will be on projects that are being researched, and projects that are helpful to us on the Black Hills. We'll go through the various topics; we won't go into the statistics, scientific information, etc., we'll just talk about what is relevant. Jack will give us some history about how research used to work, and how it works now. This is a bonus, to hear about what is going on here in Rapid City. We can ask key questions about what is relevant to the Black Hills. Rather than wait till the end, we'll stop and ask some questions. At the end we hope that you'll have a first hand knowledge of what our Research Station is doing and how they are helping us.

Blair: Because the subjects will be structured in short stories, I will allow pertinent questions from the public after each subject matter.

Thom: We'll talk about research in the Forest Service, and how we apply that research and science on the Black Hills. I'll turn it over to Jack Butler.

Jack Butler: I've given science presentations to the Board before, and we would be happy to come back any time. I'll give you a sense of where we fit in to the process of applying science to the management of the Black Hills National Forest. Our mission is to develop and deliver science based research to the Forest Service.

Questions & discussion generated by the presentation:

Blair: You mentioned that you are separate from the Forest Service, is the budget separate also?

Butler: Yes, the base appropriation is \$27.7 million.

Station Director: Sam Foster

Research Ecologist: Dr. Jack Butler

Research Wildlife Biologist: Dr. Mark Rumble

Kile: Where is the native grass seeds used for restoration efforts, grown?

Butler: We have a native plant material program. Each year National Forest Service dollars fund development of locally adapted native plant materials for restoration following a fire or other disturbance. It has been a real challenge to get these locally adapted seeds, so most of the time they come in from other areas. The ultimate goal is to get business interested in developing a concentrated source of native materials.

Smith: If an introduced plant is more productive, or easier to establish, you use them don't you?

Butler: On the filed trip, we saw areas where they were using introduced species, as kind of a nurse plant because they are easy to establish. We're seeing that natives do replace them most of the time.

Kile: Are you working with any tribal colleges with regard to the native plant materials?

Butler: No

Paterson: Who monitors response of vegetation in regard to timber harvest, grazing activities, etc?

Butler: It's a landscape level project to look at the overall patterns of vegetation, and noxious weeds, and how we might be more strategic in the activities themselves to prevent these being established. Also we want to be strategic about target and control.

Brannan: Is the new facility in Fort Collins involved with research on chronic wasting disease?

Mark Rumble: The state of Colorado is looking at those questions. In South Dakota the Game, Fish & Parks is involved with data collection. In our elk study, we cooperated with universities, collecting blood to help in their research. If it were to come up as a problem here in South Dakota, we would have to find a complimentary University to partner with.

Brian Brand: If a person wanted to do background research, what is the best way to access the work that has been done, is there a library or reference center?

Butler: Yes, there are a number of handouts. For research publications specific to the Black Hills, go to the Forest Service web site; "tree search" which is an information database. Or give the Research Station a call. All of the titles are posted, under the headings of Forestry, Range, and wildlife.

Stephanie Wacker: It's on the main Forest Service page not just RMRS, also "Digitop" which is separated by peer reviews and general reports.

Butler: We have a library in the lab as well, so give us a call.

McCracken: Please have the public identify themselves before speaking.

Thom: Next we'll talk about how we use research on the Black Hills; forest planning, project planning, monitoring, problem solving.

Questions & discussion generated by the presentation:

Blair: Do you find that where the Jasper fire was really severe, there is more aspen growth than there is pine being grown, here at seven or eight years later?

Thom: I don't know if the severity is as important as the vegetation that was there before, it is difficult to tell.

Blair: In Grizzly Gulch, on the cool side, there are a lot of aspen, and on the hot side, there is no pine on the south aspect.

Smith: Isn't it true that the sequential recovery order is weeds, aspen, and then pine? At 15 years, the aspen will dominate.

Thom: That is probably true but not on the whole landscape.

Blair: In a 1959 fire, 50 years later, the southern aspect is grassland, aspen, and no pine. The northwest aspect does have some pine.

Smith: Was there aspen before the fire?

Thom: We put in some enclosures to try to protect the suckering aspen, as part of our post fire monitoring.

Kohlbrand: Is research trying to develop the hard pitch core snag, which will stand much longer than the bug tree snags.

Thom: We have not requested research on this topic. Research says that if you do under burning periodically, these will develop. (*Hard pitch cores are an outcome of periodic fire; without fire there is no practical mechanism to build such cores. Foxx 1978*).

Hard pitch cores are an outcome of periodic fire, without fire there is no practical mechanism to build such cores.

Kohlbrand: When you did the Forest plan, and you studied these species, are you updating the habitat to be more specific to the Black Hills as you go. Just the background info about the species, for the Black Hills rather than where they came from.

Thom: Conservation studies are what Bill is referring to. We have not specifically gone back and updated.

Mark Rumble: There is some updating going on. We have quite an in depth study going on regarding Black Backed Wood Peckers. That is a Region Two sensitive species. There is some ongoing effort, but there is just one wildlife biologist in a field position that operates in Region Two.

Kohlbrand: The original documents talked about how the critter was in Minnesota or Colorado, and I wondered if you were honing in on the needs of the critters in the Black Hills.

Rumble: Yes we are, but the research is slow to come because of the budget, and the fact that there is just one wildlife biologist.

Thom: We've not gone back and updated the documents, but the information is current through 2003, and the information base is building.

Blair: In the last 10 years we have burned in excess of 180,000 acres, so a tenth of our forested area. Is the re-growth and fast recovery of aspen, a reflection of the explosion of the elk herds?

Thom: Not related to fire exclusively.

Blair: We watched a stable elk population, until we started burning.

Shelly Diesch: Their diets are like livestock, they like the same thing, and they do go to the aspen when the rest of the forage is covered or depleted. Aspen alone wasn't the reason for the explosion of the elk population.

Rumble: It's not directly related to aspen; certainly the opening of the Forest has helped. The primary source of mortality to elk is hunting. The population exploded because the growth was more than the harvest, but now it is leveling out because the GF&P is more liberal with their licenses.

Bark Beetles

Thom: The Black Hills National Forest has a close and strong relationship with the Research station.

Scherrer: Mark could you comment on how you interact with the Game, Fish & Parks?

Rumble: I'm not involved with the mountain lion research; GF&P with the University of SD handles that.

Scherrer: There is a lot of publicity, and a lot of energy regarding mountain lions. The habitat we have in the Hills is just ideal. We are getting tremendous information on the habitat of the mountain lion.

Bobzien: The Forest Service manages the habitat, the State manages the animals.

Diesch: Presentation today was on research, and it could be expanded, anytime we work on Federal lands, we integrate the information, and that is an agreement between the State and the Government. Biologists from all units of Federal, and State share information whenever research is done.

Paterson: Are you familiar with Multiple Indicator Monitoring.

B. Thompson: We're using it to do some stream monitoring; it seems to be a pretty good tool. We are familiar with it.

Paterson: We have an opportunity in October with Erv Crowley from the BLM; he will conduct a program on the protocol of how to do this. Contact Paterson for more information about attending program.

Blair: We need to set up a meeting for our task force to meet on OHV. Craig wants to be a part of that meeting.

Scherrer: Let's do it next week, 4:00 in the afternoon, on the 22nd or 24th.

Blair: Wednesday the 24th at 4:30 p.m.

Rowe: Yes

(The meeting was held on Monday, September 22nd)

Scherrer: What can the board expect from us? Will anyone get anything in advance of a meeting?

Blair: I would hope that we come to some reasonable conclusion at this meeting; we can dispense these conclusions, and have discussion in October, and make a final determination. If we need to come back to a face to face after the October board meeting, we could finalize in November.

Scherrer: We'll be putting out the EIS in the fall, let's keep moving because in 2009 we have to have something. If we can't come up with something that everyone can buy into, we'll have wasted six years. We've spent all this time, and we've drawn folks to the table, with different view points, so expect that we'll have to get together again. I just want everyone to have the benefit of knowing that we as a group have consensus, so that everyone in here who represents various constituencies, their group has done their work, and folks like Sam can ask questions, and know how we came up with it.

Blair: Our regular Board meeting is October 15. I believe we will have consensus, I also believe that at the Board level we have always allowed space for a dissenting opinion to follow along a decision.

Scherrer: The public may attend the meeting on the 24th, and we have work to get done. (*The meetings of the working group or subcommittee are open to the public and input is welcome and taken*).

Kile: I would ask that the Forest Service use biodegradable strips to flag herbicide and pesticide treatment areas so that harvesters know that they are in a treatment area.

Bobzien: As a means of identification of those treatment areas, correct?

Kile: Correct

Public Comments ~ Chairman Blair

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

Becci Rowe: I have read Dr. Rumbles publication on the elk habitat in the black hills, and I would like to recommend that the Board really use that information in their travel planning. I would just hope that we would use this tool, created by one of our own. I want to give credit where credit is due; Dr. Rumble has done wonderful work.

Brian Brand: Is there something volunteers can do in regard to travel planning and other assessments? Are there any protocols to factor out the biases that would hinder some organizations to do volunteer work?

Blair: We have had individual volunteers helping with mapping.

Brand: Is there a volunteer coordinator?

Bobzien: Tom Willems is our coordinator. The areas we are down to now are some areas where we have heritage surveys, botany surveys, safety analyses, but aside from those, one of the huge things we'll be faced with is signing the system. We will be looking for volunteers for that part of the program. Also we'll be looking for trail rangers to encourage people to do the right things.

Scherrer: On the spreadsheets, there is a line item for volunteerism, and the value of that, and we'll be working through trying to put a dollar figure on that. In addition to having buy in from everyone, we'll need help from folks like you.

Jaeger: This month the Black Hills NF lost a very valuable friend in Larry Baesler. Due to his efforts, we picked up 500 acres of the Lady C Ranch which is on the southern end of the Forest. He was a friend of conservation and an example to us all.

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 McCracken and seconded by Paterson. Meeting adjourned at 3:43 p.m.

2008 Meeting Dates:

October 15

November 19

December – No Meeting

January 6, 2009 - Tentative