

Rosebud Watershed Group
PO Box 1200, Forsyth, MT 59327
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www.rosebudcd.org

Rosebud Watershed Group Minutes
December 11, 2007

Attendees: Scott Egan, Doug Martens, Art Hayes, Dave Davenport, John Bailey, Donny Bailey, June American Horse, Bobbi Vannattan, Jewel Davenport and Laurie Kelley.

Minutes:

John Bailey made a motion to approve the minutes of the 6-12-07 meeting and the water adjudication meeting notes. The motion was seconded by Dave Davenport and it carried. Laurie will post the minutes and notes on the website.

Meetings:

When? The group discussed meeting frequency. The coordinator said that watershed groups across the state report that holding meetings on a regular schedule helps to keep the group focused and moving forward. The group agreed that meetings should be held at least quarterly. Donny Bailey made a motion that meetings be held quarterly and that Laurie and Scott consult the schedulers of other groups (weed committee, school boards, Rosebud Protective Association, etc) to see when their meetings are held and find an open date for future meetings. Doug McRae seconded the motion and it carried. Meetings will be held quarterly: January, April, July and October. If special meetings are needed they will be scheduled by the coordinator and chair. After discussion, Scott and Laurie set the next meeting date for Wednesday, January 16. It will be held in Colstrip at the Bicentennial Library Conference Room at 7 pm.

Where? The group talked about holding meetings in varying locations throughout the year in order to encourage the participation of stakeholders from all reaches of the watershed. After discussion it was decided to hold meetings in Lame Deer, Rosebud and Colstrip. The fourth location will be a floating location to be determined when the time comes. The next meeting will be held in Colstrip.

Woody Biomass:

Doug Martens updated the group on the woody biomass project.

When the group originally formed, their plan was to clean up some fuels, mainly around individual homes but that left them with piles of fuel. They started with grant money and they knew it would run out so they want to make the effort self sufficient.

The group researched numerous options. One of their ideas was to pelletize the chips to be sold for home or industrial use. During their research, they learned that their product isn't actually wood chips; it is hog fuel, because it still has the bark and needles. This makes it unacceptable for many uses, including fuel pellets for home use, because the ash content is too high. It could be used for commercial purposes, but there is nowhere nearby that can currently use the chips, so it would have to be shipped.

The group looked into a pellet mill. They discovered that a turn-key operation would cost \$500,000. There is currently \$250,000 available in grant funds, so they are about half way there.

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They are looking into other things as well. One possibility is to mix the chips with coal and ship it to plants in the east. Experts have told them that the product is in very high demand because the ash turns into clinker which can be cleaned out of the stacks and used for match sticks. The companies that use it earn energy credits. The problem is getting Western Energy to agree to blend and market it.

Martens said that there is a lot of slash left over from logging. He approximates that on Rosebud County state lands alone there is enough to deliver 80 tons of chipped wood to a plant per day/365 days a year.

There are people interested in doing the work (making the product), there's money to make the product, now they just need to find someone to buy the product.

The next step for the group is to determine what options to pursue and where to go from here. Rosebud Power Plant would require too much retrofitting to make it efficient. The PPL plants in Colstrip could probably run it but they aren't interested in doing so yet. The experts say that blending it with coal is the best idea. Blending would require a much smaller investment than a pellet mill. A smaller pellet mill could be purchased, one to make pellets for home use, but there is still the issue of left-over debris from the process. Donny Bailey suggested doing both; use the better part for home fuel and blend the rest.

Doug said there are quite a few grants out there, but some of them have already passed them by. A grant writer from Miles City was helping out, but she took another job. Rocky asked if equipment could be purchased through the Conservation District Loan Program, but the current guidelines don't permit equipment purchases.

Currently Ryan Pinkerton has the ability to grind the product and several beet farmers have offered to haul the product in their beet trucks, but there is nowhere to use the product. Fuels for Schools was a good grant program, and schools that took advantage of the funds are saving an average of \$100,000 per year in heating costs, but the grant program has no funds left.

Scott wondered why private citizens hadn't stepped up, since it sounds like a lucrative business. Doug said that Carbon Credits will soon play a larger role and that may help.

Dave suggested talking to the end user back east to see if they would help fund it.

Donny suggested talking to the state and federal legislators; get it into the farm bill and or push it as alternative energy.

Art wondered if the group could make a wood/coal pellet.

Doug said that something is going to click and work. One of the state foresters said that if thinned properly you can harvest the entire forest every 15 years. They need to be thinned so the trees aren't competing for water and with firefighting so expensive it would be a way to get the politicians on board.

Donny and Doug will put together some samples using a machine the county has. They will do a test run and bring the information to the April meeting.

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Doug invited the group to their next meeting which will be held on January 23. Laurie will let everyone know when and where it will be held.

Know Your Watershed Tour:

Scott told the group that participation was quite low. It is possible the loop was too long or maybe people just don't want to leave the park. He felt that the word didn't get out that it was a family event.

The group discussed several possibilities for next year, including holding a walking tour at the park or not holding one at all. The discussion was tabled until the next meeting.

Nominations for "At Large" Board Members:

Currently the four positions are held by Jewel Davenport, Jerry Jones, Doug McRae and Chris Evertz. Dave nominated Doug, Donny and John. Donny nominated Danny Sioux. Donny will talk to Danny and Dave will talk to Ashley's to see if anyone in that family is interested. Nominations will also be taken at the next meeting and the voting will be held at that time.

Open Mike:

Dave suggested we keep abreast of the water adjudication process. He said that Fidelity applied for water marketing rights and Northern Plains Resource Council and the Tongue River Water Users took them to court. He said that the scary thing about it all is that if you have water rights but don't use them, they can take them away.

Art said that you have to look after your own water rights.

Doug said this group may provide another way for the information to be presented.

Scott said that we shouldn't become activists, but we should educate people so they know what is coming and how best to handle it.

Doug Martens said there is a meeting on January 11, 4 pm at the Country Club. This is a chance for everyone to get together and determine a fire fighting strategy for the county. BLM, DNRC and the NC Tribe will be there and they will try to get a consensus on how best to handle the upcoming fire season.

Future Agenda Items:

-Soil sampling will be discussed in January. Do we want to continue doing it the way we have been or should the landowners take responsibility for collecting the samples. The concern with that is that the samples won't be collected in a uniform manner.

-Know Your Watershed Tour—do we want to hold one in 2008?

-Water adjudication will be discussed. Does the group want to have someone in to talk about the process?

-Hemlock is a concern in the area. We need to increase awareness that the program is out there. Laurie will contact Amy Adler to see if she can speak to the group about the potential for assistance.

-Biological Weed Control will be discussed. Does the group wish to allocate a percentage of the next WPA grant to bug research or mapping of the main weed sites?

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