

Rosebud Watershed Group

PO Box 1200
270 S. Prospect
Forsyth, MT 59327

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, September 7, 2006

GUEST SPEAKER: Doug Martens, Rosebud County Fire Warden, talked to the group about the Eastern Montana Woody Biomass Project. The project started because Rosebud County was given money by the BLM to do fuels work around wildlife interface areas. The money has to be tied to a home or subdivision, but it allows people to easily dispose of dead trees and shrubs, as well as scrap lumber. The group bought a chipper with some of the funds, but it soon became apparent that disposing of the chips would be a problem. Transporting the chips is time consuming and cost prohibitive.

A meeting was held in Miles City in June and the group came up with several ideas to solve this problem. Originally, the plan was to implement a feed system that would allow the Rosebud Power Plant to be wood fired, but the plant's permits won't allow them to sell biomass electricity. Due to the size and cost of the system necessary to utilize the fuel, it isn't economically feasible on a small scale. Miles City Community College has shown interest in using the technology and since their system would be used to heat the college and the hospital, it may be practical.

Part of the problem in getting support is the misconception that there are not enough trees in eastern Montana to sustain the project. That is not the case, however, and based on a recent survey, the logging slash that is being burned in the area right now would provide 800 tons of fuel a day/365 days a year.

Doug said that the first meeting was very productive and he is very hopeful that the idea will grow. Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation is getting involved because it is a great opportunity to improve elk habitat. Wyoming sawmills are looking at the resource as a fuel

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source for their mills. According to Doug, the idea is there, the product is there, the money is there, it just needs to be sustained.

Discussion:

Dave Davenport—what about the Forsyth pool?

Doug Martens—we are waiting to see who is on the energy committee for the pool. It would be a great source of power for them.

Jerry Lunde—what about the Hardin power plant or the sugar beet factories?

Doug Martens—the owners of the power plant weren't interested, although everyone else was. The sugar beet factories are a good idea.

Jerry Jones—what about the governor? He is very interested in alternative energy.

Doug Martens—the highest he's gone in the state is Bob Harrington, the state forester.

Don Youngauer—what about buying a portable pellet plant? The plant could be taken to the source and it could be bagged at the location. It would alleviate some of the transportation problems.

Doug Martens—that is definitely something to look into.

Wally McRae—how do you judge how far away trees need to be cleared?

Doug Martens—Ponderosa Pine needs 5-10 foot of canopy clearance. If we managed our timber properly in Rosebud County, it could be harvested every 25 years. We need to get all of the dog-hair out of there. If the timber is handled correctly, the land will grow 50% more grass.

Wally McRae—it seems when there are fires in the area, as soon as the feds come in, they discourage the landowners from fighting the fire. It happened during the Derby Fire and in Big Horn County as well.

Doug Martens—the way the rules are right now using the forest as an example, under the initial attack phase, they

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work together to put the fire out. After the first phase, the feds come in and ask that everyone leave except for those that carry a “red card”. To get a red card, you must take a 16 hour class and pass a pack test (45 pounds, 3 miles, 45 minutes). This is only applicable on federal lands, if it is on private land; the landowner and fire marshal have all the authority.

Doug Martens—Rosebud County has had more fires this year than any other year in recorded history. To date, 120 fires have been reported. Several nights there were 10 or more fires, one night there were 12 reported and one night 15. This has been a record setting year.

Scott Egan—there are a lot of problems with dog-hair on the watershed; could we work with the biomass group? There is EQIP money available for reduction; we could coordinate the money with biomass dollars and have a win-win situation.

The group will do further research and decide how involved they want to be in the biomass effort.

INITIATIVE 154: The group discussed I-154. This initiative would require taxpayers to pay developers NOT to build. If a plant owner is restricted from doing an activity; then they can be compensated or require the rule or restriction to be removed.

Jerry Jones didn't think the watershed group should get involved in the campaign to defeat the initiative. Dave Davenport suggested that members go to their neighbors and government officials to express their opinions and concerns. The group agreed.

SOIL SAMPLING: Larry has a draft plan for review.

- Where will the new soil sampling sites be located?

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Jerry Lunde suggested testing tribal land on Muddy Creek, because of the development there. Another suggestion was to sample near Busby (after Bixby's). Shanny Spang, CBM coordinator for the Northern Cheyenne, volunteered to ask the tribe if we can do soil and water sampling. If they already have the data, and agree to allow us to use it, we will just incorporate it into our data base. Shanny will update us on these efforts at the next meeting.

- How often are we going to conduct soil sampling at all sites?
Larry's report suggested testing the USGS sites once a year, in the spring, more often if an event occurs. Scott Egan and Dave Davenport agreed, as long as we are consistent, we should be alright for baseline. If something starts to show some change, then we will address it. The group agreed to follow this protocol.

WELL-WATER SAMPLING: The group discussed testing well-water at the soil sampling locations. The group would like to test both water quality and flow rates. Doug McRae told the group that Rosebud CD has equipment for testing for pH, EC and nitrates. Scott Egan suggested that we determine what the flows are seasonally. We can keep track of them over time and then if we see a downturn in flow, we can look for the cause. The group decided to approach John Wheaton and see if he will attend the next meeting to discuss what is necessary to start monitoring.