



## Northern Rockies Fire Prevention & Education Committee

Fall Meeting  
October 6, 2021

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**In attendance:** Naaman Horn, Kristin Mortenson, Chris Barth, Terina Goicoechea, Jennifer Russell, Neal Beetch, Isaac Wald, Kary Maddox, Julia Berkey, Keith VanBroeke,

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### Agenda

#### Review of Action Items from [Spring 2021 Meeting](#) (virtual)

The following are items that require further action:

1. Chris/Anna - see if SWMTPET can set up a channel under National FPET TEAMS for files storage/sharing **DONE:** Channel for NR has been set up under the National FPET in Teams. This can be the place for NR prevention products, assignments, etc. FPET members have been added. Can add FPEC members as “guests.”
2. Need to transfer ownership of the fire prevention google drive before Rita retires. **DONE:** Transferred to CJ - CJ receives two-factor authentication.
3. CJ/Anna will try to get FireRestrictions.US data into a form that we can use to compare human-caused fires during Area restrictions. **DONE:** Some library information was saved. Everything else was lost.
4. CJ will draft a white paper/proposal to instruct IMTs in Northern Rockies to do structure assessments in SAM alongside Collector. **Ongoing**
5. Chris, CJ, and Ali will set up separate meeting to do some virtual training on risk assessments. **Ongoing:** scheduled for winter/spring
6. Rita will have some information put together of fire causes in time for the spring NRCG Board meeting. **DONE:** Report was sent to FPEC members with notes.
7. Need to fill Zone and Agency representative vacancies (Zone - Central Montana and North Dakota. Agency - North Dakota Forest Service and State Fire Wardens). Clarify representative for Northern ID. **DONE:** Beth Hill (NDFS) is new rep for NDFS Agency and ND Zone. Jen Vafiades is the new North & Central ID Zone rep. John Huston is Central MT Zone Rep.
8. Chris/Naaman will schedule a spring Restriction and Media Coordinators call once the fire restrictions website issue has been resolved. **DONE**
9. Chris will include Fire Restriction Website Working Group March Update with the spring FPEC notes. **DONE**
10. Action Item: Chris will get info to Jen about BLM ID detail and info about Maverick buy. **DONE**
11. NRCG FPEC members share their social media platforms with each other to promote others' messaging. **Ongoing**
12. Consider a monthly webinar series – work with FAM LN to coordinate. **Ongoing**

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## Old Business

- Fire Restrictions (website) Working Group
  - MTFireInfo.org
    - 177,233 page views
    - 142,214 unique hits
    - 62 % viewed from cell phone
  - Moving forward – received good feedback, looking at 508 compliancy, want to improve bounce rate (those that leave immediately – avg. 55%).
  - Want it to grow into a broader fire information website (fire adapted communities, etc.).
  - MTFireInfo.org will continue to be managed by DNRC – will continue to use the task group to discuss. Plan was to distribute control to Restrictions Coordinators – remains the plan but will continue to discuss with task group, NRCG Board, and Restriction Coordinators. DNRC would continue to keep control of base maps.
- 2021 Fire Prevention Campaign (Anna)
  - SWMT FPET used the phrase that was approved “Treasure Our State.” Did this information get out to others that this is what could unify the state? They did statewide messaging, so it was present across MT. Just curious if others used it too.
  - The team held weekly meetings with others in R1 to discuss what others are doing and implementing. It was ok but I think it can be better on sharing ideas and working as a larger team to make prevention happen. Good things came out of these meetings for sure! An idea that hit a wall was finally revived because someone had a direct contact with our Senators and Representatives so that was huge, and it happened quickly once it was started!
  - They started a new google site for prevention materials. Graphics that are in a format that can still be edited. Some items have been uploaded but more need to be from the SWMT team, it’s been busy, and pushing others do the same so we are sharing vs. creating from scratch. Big thing is to never delete an item - contact Anna Bateson or Kristin Mortenson if something needs removed. Since all that are invited have editing capabilities this is important. Anna will upload a Guideline Document with what is expected in the site. Also, if anyone needs the link here it is to the Folder.
    - [https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/14qboJpeYCN49\\_0sW8rVRzc1tICJ7DsZU?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/14qboJpeYCN49_0sW8rVRzc1tICJ7DsZU?usp=sharing)
  - The SWMT zone also recognizing we need Prevention training. We did mini lessons last year and they went well. They want specific prevention training so that they can get seasonals introduced to prevention, have the knowledge of what is prevention and what it means, as well as getting informational lessons out there for permanent and supervisory staff. They thought that P101 would be good, but it hasn’t been revised since 2006 and Fred Turk said it was held up and won’t be looked at until 2022. So, they would prefer to do more mini lessons in a workshop format: 1) what is prevention and what are the 3Es and A, 2) quick intro to WPSAPS, 3) how to implement fire restrictions and what does it mean, 4) what is a prevention team, 5) basic graphics using free apps, 6) fire information how to, etc. CJ is looking into finding objectives for P101 to see if our mini workshops will fill those objectives.
  - SWMT Wildfire Prevention & Education Team Final Report be sent to FPEC members **DONE**

- Wildfire Prevention Spatial Assessment Planning Strategies (WPSAPS)
    - Anna is looking at getting the WPSAPS cadre to help with a training again for R1. R1 didn't hold a training this year, but folks were invited to attend trainings. Looking at another WPSAPS training in the spring (April/May) once more folks come on.
    - BLM will be offering WPSAPS training for State and District fire mitigation and education staff. Looking to increase use of WPSAPS – particularly in areas where there is a lot of shared FS boundaries.
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### New Business

- Fire Restrictions (website) Working Group
    - Lots of room for improvement for the general Restrictions process. Some contradictory methods in the NR Fire Restriction Plan – i.e.: Many counties went into Stage II, but some entities needed exemptions – even emergency work. Would be valuable to have explicit instructions about things like exemptions.
    - Chris: **Start a group to work on this:** Terina, Kary Maddox, Isaac Wald, and Chris Barth are willing to participate.
      - Chris: Are we restricting the right things? Are the Zones correct? Exemptions efficient? Need work group on restrictions to help advise Board on this? Is there a way to move through this gracefully?
      - Perhaps we can look 508 compliance and emergency work at the same time?
    - Terina: it is a simple process, especially if you have a well-thought-out plan that ALL follow! A lot of independent action this year which made things difficult (one item to bring up and hammer out).
    - Jen Russell: ID did well—went in mid-June and stayed in until mid-September, no going in and out. Lot of self-policing, though some illegal debris burning but more arson. Forest issues were mostly inexcusable where individuals had to have passed multiple notification of restrictions. Also noted a shift in public support for restrictions and self-policing.
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### Zone Reports

- **Central Montana:** (John Huston): **no report**
- **Eastern Montana** (Shannon Bonney):
  - PSA for 6 weeks with the state and other FED agency on the radio.
  - Miles City Restriction Area did 27 orders
  - Billings Restriction Area did 29 orders and closures for the year.
  - 5 education events
  - Total number of people and events and Education events: 612 people
  - number of events had to cancel due to fire: 2
- **North Central Montana** (Shannon Bonney):
  - PSA for 6 weeks with the state on the radio
  - 6 education events
  - number events cancel due to COVID restriction: 1
  - All counties were in Stage I or Stage II restrictions starting the first of July. Still have a couple of counties in Stage I restrictions.
- **North Dakota:** (Beth Hill): Had an active fire season and with that comes a lot of prevention and education work. Began our spring fire season in January, which is almost unheard of. The lack of snowpack and dry conditions leading into Fall 2020 gave ND cured, dry fuels standing in the field

across the entire state. Couple that with a severe drought through the entirety of the 2021 growing season, ND has recorded over 2400 fires that have burned over 125,000 acres in the state. State resources met via Zoom for Wildland Fire Readiness level calls as needed throughout the season, but many times they maintained a weekly check-in for these, due to the conditions. These calls were intended to discuss the forecast, predicted fuel/fire behavior and activity, areas of concern, and preposition firefighting resources across the state based on those needs.

In addition to this taskforce, many of these partners were invited to serve on the Governor's State Wildfire and Drought Unified Command, which met biweekly to discuss the collaborative efforts and direction that was needed for the state. The ND Forest Service (NDFS) and ND Department of Emergency Services (NDES) were also responsible for developing the Wildland Fire Taskforce, which was adopted to allow local fire departments the ability to respond outside of their jurisdictions, if necessary.

This active season called for a lot of prevention work. The strategic communications chief from the NDES and Beth developed several campaigns through social media and traditional media outlets. They utilized materials that Beth's predecessor (Aubrey) had created, materials Montana had created, and some Firewise, One Less Spark, and Smokey Bear campaigns. They published press releases on timely topics, such as human caused fires, burn bans, red flag warnings, holidays, and updates on ongoing, high profiles wildfires. The most popular of these was the 944 fire that burned near Medora, ND, one of the most popular ND tourist attractions. They did many interviews for newspaper, radio, and TV on these various fire prevention topics, and created a PSA that circulated social media and local TV. Many counties implemented burn bans, most of which are tied to the daily Fire Danger Rating.

- **North & Central ID** (Jen Vafiades): no report
- **Northwest Montana** (Keith VanBroeke): Good communication this year, restrictions went in at end of June and came out 8/25. Had 5" rain in August. Appreciated the MTFireInfo site, Julia/crew was really responsive. NW has provided a lot of feedback to her. Worked closely w/ SW Prev. Team and working with other zones went well. Spent a lot of time updating old restrictions website on various materials. FSF and FAK doing a lot of work w/ partners, continuing to push Cohesive Strategy, fire adaption. End of Keith's tour. Working w/ Ali to put together notes on restrictions as a follow-up to season. Jeremy Harker (GNP) will be taking over for the Zone next year.
- **South Central Montana** (Forrest Ford): Although Covid is still very much impacting everyone, South Central Montana Zone still managed to be active in the community and get their message to the public. They started off on February 10 with a virtual career fair for Bozeman Senior High School. There were three of these virtual events throughout the season. In addition, they did six school events ranging from kindergarten to high school, covering safe camping, the role of fire in nature's cycle, and "Why are we cutting those trees?" They performed two LINKS for Learning events, two parades, five Farmers' Market events, one 4-H fair, and one independent event with the bear techs at our local ranch supply store. They took part in the Prevention PD group, did seven Firewise home assessments, attended four county commission meetings concerning developments and Firewise design/defensible space, and went out as PIO on two fires. Went into fire restrictions this year. There were enforcement difficulties, as is par for the course. They maintained the signage, kept up patrols of likely areas, and found abandoned campfires; but only had one human start on district.
- **Southwest Montana** (Kristin Mortenson for CJ): Restrictions are a pain! Primary issues were splintering of Zone into different restrictions from counties split with other Zones. Made messaging/communicating with public difficult (i.e., SWMT Indicates potential issues w/ Zone

boundaries as well if the members can't agree. Exemptions were also an issue, as well as applicants tagging on "rider" projects to emergency work requests.

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## Agency Reports

- **Bureau of Indian Affairs:** no report
- **BLM** (Chris Barth): 508 compliance is an issue to deal with/work on. Once digitally signed becomes problematic as no edits can be made. Need to make sure templates are available, language is consistent and clear on what/how. Increased use/exposure of WPSAPS: option for prevention plans. Prevention messaging: number of interagency campaigns, wildfire awareness month, looking forward to being more ahead of the game next year (message a day and more). Maybe divide up messaging and agencies share work and all work together to share consistent messaging. Hunting regulations messaging coming out, warming fires, etc. Mitigation—lots of cooperation throughout MT and surrounding areas, 1000 acres of treatment on non-fed lands through cooperative agreements. Covid restrictions make things difficult, some traditional programs still not happening though creative workarounds are being implemented.
- **MT Disaster and Emergency Services:** no report
- **US Fish & Wildlife Service** (Neal Beetch): Agency continues to support partners w/ fire restrictions. Go with their neighbors. Stick w/ BLM primarily due to adjacent land ownership.
- **USDA Forest Service** (Chris Johnson): CJ's detail ends this week, then might have another detail following him.
- **MT Fire Chiefs Association:** no report
- **MT Sheriffs & Peace Officers Assoc:** no report
- **NPS** (Naaman Horn): went into restrictions w/ neighbors, smaller units in restrictions most if not all of the season. Share content on prevention on their channels/social media.
- **State Fire Wardens:** no representative
- **State of Idaho** (Jennifer Russell): discuss whole state: great partnership with ID DOT—reader boards on major highways used to relay fire danger, restrictions, etc. Worked to build check system so that not over-utilizing and thus getting complacency. Decided on different trigger levels for PL levels, weather watch out situations, highway caused fires, etc. One of the fastest growing states so eyes on the highway is big, as well as GSTV. Will use again. Partnership w/ ID Firewise beneficial. Did work on actual mitigation with them in shoulder. Follow State Restrictions plans very closely and mostly all go together in and out.
- **Montana DNRC** (Kristin Sleeper): Keep Montana Green held the 60th annual wildfire prevention art contest. The 2021 contest doubled the prize money, created new statewide winners, and created a Coloring Book Division. Continued the interagency PSA partnership on Northern Broadcast System. DNRC aired 18 spots over two weeks covering campfires, the home ignition zone, and equipment fires. Funded four weeks of PSAs on Northern Ag News Network in coordination with BLM covering harvest safety in eastern Montana. The :30 second PSA ran for 4 weeks. Provided fire prevention social media content covering a variety of topics including: Wildfire awareness, HIZ, open burning safety tips, campfire safety, and other associated prevention campaigns. Partnered with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to get permanent fire prevention signage installed at the top ten most visited Aquatic Invasive Species check stations. Continue to market the Free Home Assessment Program (or Wildfire Site Preparedness Visit Program), engaging over 75 Montanans since July 1, 2021. Supported and led the Fire Adapted Montana Learning Network, hosting quarterly connection calls and field visits to highlight and amplify the ongoing work around prescribe fire and insurance. Supported nearly every county as they entered into Stage 1 or Stage 2 fire restrictions during the core of the 2021 fire year.

- **State of North Dakota:** (Beth Hill): The North Dakota Forest Service distributes Smokey Bear educational materials to second grade classrooms statewide to celebrate Fire Prevention Week in October. This year, they reached 106 teachers and 2095 students across the state. Smokey appeared at several public events this year, including the “Blast at the Border” which taught visitors of the International Peace Garden about firework safety and fire prevention over Independence Day weekend. He will be spreading the good word of fire prevention at NDSU’s tailgating lot for our upcoming Trees Bowl game on Oct 30. At this event, NDFS will host the annual Trees Awards ceremony, which honors individuals, groups, and agencies who go above and beyond for ND’s forest resources, and this year, many of our honorees have been directly responsible for work managing and mitigating wildfire. NDFS Fire Manager, Ryan Melin, is receiving Natural Resources Professional of the Year; NDDDES is receiving the Excellence in Government award for their contributions; Flasher Rural Fire Protection District is Fire Department Cooperator of the Year; and Homeland Security Director Cody Schulz is receiving the Distinguished Leadership award, for his leadership with the ND Wildfire and Drought Taskforce.

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### Action Items Moving Forward

The following are items that require further action:

1. **CJ:** draft a white paper/proposal to instruct IMTs in Northern Rockies to do structure assessments in SAM alongside Collector.
2. **Chris, CJ, and Ali:** set up separate meeting to do some virtual training on risk assessments – winter 2021/spring 2022
3. **NRCG FPEC members:** share social media platforms with each other to promote others’ messaging.
4. Consider a monthly webinar series – work with FAM LN to coordinate.
5. **Anna Henderson:** upload a Guideline Document with what is expected on the SWMT Fire Prevention and Education Team Google site.
6. **SWMT FPET:** offer prevention training - mini lessons - in a workshop format
  - a. **CJ:** look into objectives for P101 to see if mini workshops match those objectives.
7. **Anna Henderson:** looking at another WPSAPS training in the spring (April/May) once more folks come on.
8. Restrictions Website Task Group support for MTFireInfo development into broader info website
9. Establish separate task group to discuss NR Restrictions and Closure Plan: **Terina Goicoechea, Kary Maddox, Isaac Wald, and Chris Barth**
  - a. **Chris** will work on getting Board tasking and approval
  - b. Are we restricting the right things? Are the Zones correct? Exemptions efficient? Need work group on restrictions to help advise Board on this? Is there a way to move through this gracefully?
  - c. Perhaps we can look 508 compliance and emergency work at the same time?
  - d. Follow-up w/ **CJ** needed on the restriction survey he sent out to make sure that it reached all intended audience and asks the correct questions. Working group can modify and send out
10. **Chris** will take care of submitting FPEC report to NRCG Board
11. **Namaan** Horn is the FPEC Chair and **Jennifer** Russell is the FPEC Vice Chair beginning 1/1/2022

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### Bin Items

- N/A

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## FPEC Report for Fall NRCG Meeting

- Accomplishments
  - MTFireInfo.org was deployed as a replacement fire restrictions website. The new site offers an interactive fire restriction dashboard for all entities in Montana. In early summer, the page developers (DNRC and working group) added a fire information dashboard that displays current incident information for all of Montana – *this was not anticipated until 2022 but was completed ahead of schedule*. Since MTFireInfo.org has been live, there have been 177,233 page views (62 % viewed from cell phone).
  - SWMT Fire Prevention & Education Team channel established within the National Fire Prevention & Education Team TEAMS environment.
  - Filled multiple vacant Zone and Agency Representatives
  - Held multiple fire restrictions coordination virtual meetings in the spring for all Zones/Areas prior to fire restrictions being enacted and release of the MTFireInfo.org website.
  - The SWMT PET operated for 98 days to reach potentially more than six million residents and visitors across Montana and within the SWMT Zone by providing wildfire prevention messaging to reduce human caused fires.
- Current Project Status
  - MTFireInfo.org working group - received good feedback from initial year of deployment.
    - Looking at 508 compliancy, improve bounce rate (those that leave immediately, and grow into a broader fire information website).
- Status of Taskings
  - Would like the NRCG Board to task the FPEC with reestablishing the Fire Restrictions working group
    - Lots of room for improvement for the general Restrictions process. Some contradictory methods in the NR Fire Restriction Plan:
    - many counties went into Stage II, but some entities needed exemptions – even for emergency work.
    - would be valuable to have explicit instructions about things like exemptions.
    - are we restricting the right things?
    - are the Zones correct?
    - Are exemptions efficient?
    - Revise NRCG Fire Restrictions & Closure Plan to include more specific direction for Restriction Areas and necessary updates for MTFireInfo.org
    - Working group members: Terina, Kary Maddox, Isaac Wald, and Chris Barth
- Questions or Concerns to be discussed with the Board
  - Ongoing support for Fire Restrictions/Fire Information (MTFireInfo.org) website working group
  - Task FPEC with new Fire Restrictions working group tasking to address items above (Status of Taskings)
  - Need to identify a State Fire Wardens representative for the FPEC

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## Next Meeting:

- Spring 2022 (Date TBA)