

Montana Back Roads 4x4 Club, Inc.  
Minutes July 22, 2010

Montana Back Roads 4x4 Club, Inc., called to order by President Willie Worthy at 6:05 pm at Jakers Restaurant, Brooks Street, Missoula.

Members present: Dave and Karen Knapp and kids, Dick and Sue Riebe, Jeanne and Willie Worthy, Erik Englebert, Steve Knutsen, Curtis and Justin Evelo, Bruce Erickson, Fred McDowell, Kyle Ness, and guest Steve Gehring, plus three friends of Derek Emerson who came in late, and who all have Cherokees, along with speaker Sharon Sweeney, Superior District Ranger, and her husband Pat.

Willie gave Divide Ride report: hot, dusty and lots of mosquitoes. You'd spray yourself with "Off" and attract even more. Dick and Sue, Bill Boldt, John and Donna Ayres, plus prospective members Jim and Laura Cornwell also attended.

Larry Garrison broke transfer case on third day.....  
Really a bummer, as Larry is quite vigilant on maintenance, so did he break or was it ploy to save on gas?

Two trails were listed as class 4, maybe more like 3.5 for a very short distance, but interesting to see some new country and trails.

At Divide Ride, a club member brought up why Forest Service is promoting ATV trails. Ravalli County Off Road Users Association just received a \$13,000 grant for signage. Willie stressed that club needs to be more pro-active.

Dick did delegate's report (meeting held after Divide Ride): Mike Hines, editor of 4xForum, would like someone else to take over. Treasurer Dawn Hines asked to move checking account from Bozeman bank (only branch in state) to Billings First Interstate, which has many branches. Dick reported that Divide Ride had 85 vehicles registered about ½ of what they have had in the past. 2011 Divide Ride is looking into Polson area, running Wild Bill/Blacktail Trail and others, Skyliners 4x4 Club has formed committee. Vern Ball and Don Apker will be chairpersons again. Would stay at Polson and then caravan 45 minutes or so to trails. BF Goodrich has promised tires for next year's DR. Warn provided winch for raffle to trail leaders/tail gunners. Association needs a regional vice president for our area. Next delegate's meeting will be October 2, in Billings. Dick probably will attend, and Willie will check with Jeff MacGill.

August meeting will be bbq/club party at Bill and Charlene Boldt's, date will be sent via email. Bruce had asked about obtaining a side by side vehicle to use for demo/obstacle course at party, Willie asked if any one wanted to try to promote one. Fred volunteered to obtain a Kawasaki. Curtis has many cones we can use for obstacle course.

Erik, and probably Mark Pickles and Larry Garrison will lead trip to Carruthers and Mountain Ben Lakes first part of September.

Sharon Sweeny, Forest Service District Ranger for Superior district, spoke on various subjects. Every project has to meet NEPA standards (National Environmental Policy Act). NEPA doesn't always have to include either an EA (environmental assessment, which takes about a year, approximate cost of \$50,000 to \$250,000) or an EIS (environmental impact study, generally takes two to three years). As an example, just for road analysis, an interdisciplinary team (ID team) made of at least fish biologist, hydrologist, soil scientist, wildlife biologist, botanist, recreation technician, silviculturist, and ranger (and most likely some I've missed!) look at all the good and bad aspects of a road, which are discussed road by road. They look at such things as sediment, slump, riparian ecological systems, culverts, weed issues, is road needed for fire suppression or for access to community recreation demands, can the FS maintain it to adequate standards, and even social issues: firewood, more open roads or more closed areas, or Christmas tree cutting.

Willie asked doesn't opinion of district ranger, whether pro or con on roads, affect the decision? Sharon says it certainly does, but team will look at all of public input after issuing scoping or proposed action plan letter. FS then issues a proposed plan with another public comment period before issuing final decision. Fred asked who makes the final decision. Sharon stated that it depends on the individual project, sometimes the district ranger or sometimes forest supervisor. She passed around examples of a scoping letter.

Willie brought up that individuals need to contact the individual forests (such as Lolo, or Beaverhead/Deer Lodge), to be put on mailing lists. Sharon mentioned that the schedule of proposed actions are posted quarterly on each forest's web site.

Each forest has a five year action plan, and you can contact your district ranger or forest supervisor, make an appointment, and present your own plan or ideas. Hints for approaching either: "I understand there is five year plan and budgeting concerns, but we have this specific project/area we would like to....." and have all your backup information, including Wild Bill/Blacktail contact info on what they've accomplished.

Curtis asked if there was any better way to maintain continuity when working with district rangers. Several times the club has developed a good rapport with a ranger and then lost ground when that ranger moves to a different position. Sharon stated that some rangers are bigger risk takers than others, and more willing to work with groups. She said best bet would be to make appointment

with forest supervisor, advise them of what you've accomplished and what you want to continue accomplishing with new ranger.

Erik asked how policy shifts? Can include mandates from President, national policy through USDA, and generally a major event causes it: such as the fires of 2000. At this point, funding is "flat", is even going down. Write your congressmen and encourage more funding.

Willie asked how to re-open a road that has been closed, NEPA applies, then scoping letter, and so on. Not very likely it would happen, which is why we need to continue to work to keep roads open.

He also brought up how that in Missoula area there are no challenging trails or areas. The media promotes all the changes you can make to a vehicle or quad, but then there is no place to use a modified vehicle. Superior district offers no challenges. Definitely need more cooperation between FS and four wheel drive clubs, as we don't just want graded roads. Clubs want more loop trails that go to scenic destination. Sharon did say that Superior district hasn't made an effort to look for specific trails that could be developed. Bruce brought up the fact that Deer Lodge area trails were built by miners and farmers looking for irrigation water, while those on Lolo NF were built as logging roads. Sharon asked what would be a good length for 4x4 trail, as ATV-ers want many miles.

Curtis said that ATV-ers are looking at keeping lots of trails open, challenging or not. Perhaps four wheel drive clubs need to do the same.

He also mentioned the Garden Point area  
Which has old logging road that parallels main road, could be developed into challenging route.

Sharon said that he need to talk to Chad Benson, the new Ninemile District Ranger. Sharon also mentioned this area might be inventoried roadless.

Sharon has pushed for more public facilities (campgrounds, pit toilets, etc.) in Superior district, and they've worked extremely hard to make forest map accurate. All the forests will now have what's called MVUMs (motor vehicle use maps), but the area shown is so large, it's hard to find specific areas. If you should find an error on any FS map, GPS it and report it, as it is most difficult checking if you've left off a road.

Jeanne asked if road is not shown on new proposed forest plan map, does that mean it is closed (the club's understanding at this point)? Sharon said to check with specific forest, as may not be true for all.

**Sharon also mentioned contacting Mac Long, with Fish, Wildlife, and Parks regarding proposed Fish Creek area state park, as they might be willing to include some 4x4 trails in this area.**

FYI, the Lolo National Forest has 6,500 miles of road, which includes much bull trout habitat, and receives much more moisture than, for example, Beaverhead Deer Lodge NF, which causes roads to “fill in” with native growth within two or three years if not used.

Meeting adjourned at 8:05 pm.