



WHIP Council Meeting Minutes

Dates: July 14–15, 2026

Location: Helena, MT

Recorder: Ken Plourde

Attendance:

- **Council:** Karen L., Chris M., Ray S., Brandon K., Pat S.
 - **Note-** Karen was unable to attend meeting day 2. Motions made on that day were relayed to her via email for her vote after the meeting.
- **FWP:** Ken P., Andrew A., Ken M.
- **Public:** ~10 attendees (view-only)

1. Opening

Introductions were made. Early discussion focused on the use of PR funding, the ability to match with WHIP state dollars, and considerations for tribal eligibility and proportional allocations.

Council agreed to review project proposals in order of ranking score.

2. Project Decisions (Motions Made)

Below are all projects where **a motion was made**, including the **decision** and **any conditions or recommendations**.

TRMR B&C Conifers

Decision: *Fully funded.*

Motion: Pat; seconded by Karen; passed unanimously.

Notes: Strong proposal, realistic scope, high habitat value.

Great Burn

Decision: *Fund for 2 years at requested rate; recommend future applications remove supply/training items.*

Motion: Brandon; seconded by Pat; passed unanimously.

Notes: Council supportive but concerned about “standard operations” and long-term supplies.

Bob Marshall Weeds

Decision: *Fund as requested for 2 years.*

Motion: Pat; seconded by Chris; passed unanimously.

Notes: Strong partner match; request for better monitoring/photos in future.

North Fork Spanish Creek

Decision: *Fund as requested.*

Motion: Brandon; seconded by Pat; passed unanimously.

Notes: Strong collaboration; good beaver/tolerance demonstration project.

Lower Boulder

Decision: *Fund as requested.*

Motion: Chris; seconded by Ray; passed unanimously.

Notes: Good wildlife components and clear project structure. Some questions about long-term property management.

R3 Grayling

Decision: *Fund for 2 years, but request more specific locational information.*

Motion: Chris; seconded by Karen; passed unanimously.

Notes: High conservation priority; council wants more specificity on selected projects.

Lower Grant Creek

Decision: *Fund as requested.*

Motion: Karen; seconded by Chris; passed unanimously.

Notes: Strong partner support; high visibility to public; fencing details noted as costly but beneficial.

Upper Jefferson Channel Restoration

Decision: *Fund as requested.*

Motion: Chris; seconded by Karen; passed unanimously.

Notes: Some concern over lack of vegetation component; benefits to native fish need clarification.

Bangtail Creek

Decision: *Fund with grant admin removed.*

Motion: Pat; seconded by Chris; passed unanimously.

Notes: Strong partner contribution; remove administrative expenses.

Blackfeet Tribal Proposal (Day 2)

Decision: *Fund with remaining \$58,000; ask for focused prioritization and reapply next year.*

Motion: Pat; seconded by Chris; passed 3-0, with Brandon abstaining; Karen's vote pending.

Notes: Council wants more detail on wildlife movement barriers; appreciate tribal partnership; future refinement needed.

Final Overall Funding Decision (Day 2)

Decision: *Fund 10 projects totaling \$1,844,289.20.*

Motion: Chris; seconded by Pat; passed unanimously (pending confirmation from Karen).

Notes: Two projects recommended to reapply next year; remainder not recommended.

3. Projects Highly Ranked But Motion to Delay:

Clark Fork Grass Valley

Decision: *Ask to reapply next year once BOR funding and permits are secured.*

Motion: Chris; seconded by Pat; passed unanimously.

Notes: Council supportive but felt timing and permitting readiness insufficient for funding this year.

Big Hole Spring Creek

Decision: *Delay; ask to reapply when permits are secured.*

Motion: Karen; seconded by Brandon; passed unanimously.

Notes: Strong project but pending permit needs; check relationship to Big Hole CCAA.

4. Unfunded Projects

The following **were discussed but not funded** (no motions approving funding):

- Sieben
- Musselshell
- Lane Ranch
- Eitten Ridge
- ACES grazing systems
- Upper Missouri Restoration (discussion only; no motion to fund)
- Browns Gulch
- Flathead Ridge Ranch
- Bluebird House
- Haines Homestead

Outcome: Not recommended for funding.

5. Summary of Other Discussion Points (Non-motion Items)

These points summarize discussions across the meeting not tied to decisions:

Public Access & Ranking Guidance

- Need better clarity on ranking public access, especially for river/riparian projects where benefits extend downstream.
- Consider reducing weight of public access in ranking.
- Develop clearer instructions for evaluating game vs. SGCN vs. nonnative species.

Project Readiness & Permitting

- Several projects lacked permits; council expressed desire to prioritize proposals that are ready to implement.
- Recommended guidance updates to encourage applicants to secure permits prior to applying.

Monitoring & Reporting

- Council wants stronger monitoring expectations: photos, outcome summaries, and biological letters of support where relevant.
- Idea of showcasing completed projects to improve public awareness.

Tribal Projects

- Council expressed interest in tribal project funding and possibly setting aside a percentage of WHIP dollars, acknowledging tribal lands cover ~10% of Montana.

Ranking Reform

- Reordering scoring criteria to more closely match application structure.
- Potential new score items, including:
 - Species of Conservation Need (standalone ranking item)
 - Public engagement/volunteer involvement
 - Tribal participation
 - Spatial/temporal project scale

Program Operations

- Need for clearer bylaws: quorum definition, vote thresholds, and council rules (based on Robert's Rules).
 - Possible ceiling on project funding amounts.
 - Desire for applicant webinars or training videos.
 - Future meeting could include a field tour (Upper Ruby suggested).
-

6. Recommendations for Program Improvement

Based on council discussion:

- Add explicit guidance for:
 - Public access scoring
 - River/downstream benefit scoring
 - SGCN prioritization
 - Differentiation between game species relevance and conflict/tolerance issues
- Improve budget table instructions.
- Encourage applicants to:
 - Strengthen partner involvement and volunteer contributions
 - Provide maps and locational specificity
 - Clarify wildlife benefits, especially for grazing and fencing projects
- Develop a more intuitive ranking rubric endorsed by council.
- Prepare bylaws and voting rules for next meeting.
- Consider a webinar and example agreements/templates for applicants.

7. Summary and Feedback for Unfunded Projects

Sieben (*Discussed In Depth Day 1 and Revisited Day 2*)

Discussion: Concerns that wildlife benefits were unclear; emphasis on grazing system improvements rather than wildlife habitat outcomes; questions about the need for 4-strand

high-tensile fencing; uncertainty about how fencing choices support wildlife movement; weed spraying and conifer encroachment components seen as positive but not central to the proposal; lack of clear explanation of how proposed actions benefit priority species; council consensus to request a more wildlife-focused proposal next year.

Recommendations: Clarify wildlife benefits with species-specific details; justify fencing type and explain how it enhances wildlife movement; demonstrate necessity of each fence segment; strengthen narrative on habitat improvement outcomes; expand details on weed and conifer treatments and their ecological value; include monitoring plans for wildlife response and habitat change; add maps, timelines, and project implementation details; reapply next year with a wildlife-centric project design.

Decision: *Not funded; encourage reapplication next year with clearer wildlife benefit and fence justification.*

**Consensus decision (no formal motion).*

Musselshell:

Discussion: Habitat conditions were poor; unclear long-term benefits; pump purchase appeared irrigation focused.

Recommendations: Clarify ecological benefits; focus on long-term riparian recovery; avoid irrigation items; add vegetation restoration.

Lane Ranch:

Discussion: Ventenata issues; grazing not an appropriate treatment; unclear wildlife benefit.

Recommendations: Provide clear invasive plant treatment plan; articulate wildlife benefits; clarify partners and mapping.

Eitten Ridge:

Discussion: Project resembled general fire/fuels operations; lacked specific wildlife habitat benefit.

Recommendations: Provide species-specific habitat benefits; improve project detail; clarify partners and ecological rationale.

ACES Grazing Systems:

Discussion: Unclear land ownership; excessive historical narrative; vague wildlife benefits.

Recommendations: Provide project-specific actions; clarify wildlife outcomes; improve public access details; define partner roles.

Upper Missouri Restoration:

Discussion: Very small scale; unrealistic vegetation timelines; unclear alignment with broader restoration.

Recommendations: Present feasible timelines; articulate species benefits; consider small-grant category; integrate broader watershed goals.

Browns Gulch:

Discussion: Lacked partners; included ineligible expenses; unclear project execution.

Recommendations: Add partners; remove ineligible items; strengthen description of wildlife benefits; clarify roles.

Flathead Ridge Ranch WHIP:

Discussion: Limited detail; unclear connection to larger habitat effort; no partners.

Recommendations: Provide detailed project plan; identify species benefits; show partner involvement; connect funding to larger effort.

Bluebird House:

Discussion: Passionate but small-scale; bird clubs typically fund similar efforts; not tied to species of concern.

Recommendations: Seek alternative funding; connect to larger habitat efforts; show alignment with WHIP priorities.

Haines Homestead:

Discussion: Fencing for cattle exclusion; unclear wildlife benefits; lacked partners and biological justification.

Recommendations: Provide biological analysis of need; increase partner involvement; add maps and SOC benefit details.

General Recommendations for Unfunded Projects:

- Clarify wildlife benefits and species outcomes.
- Provide detailed maps, monitoring plans, and timelines.
- Show strong partner involvement and matching funds.
- Avoid administrative or non-habitat budget items.
- Demonstrate project readiness and secure permits.

8. Next Meeting

Discussed the way other Habitat Bureau councils often meet twice per year, including a field tour. In the coming months we should do a meeting to discuss some of the program improvement ideas and how to refine those things for next year. Members were interested in a 2-day meeting/field tour similar to how other councils operate.

Ray offered a field tour of the existing/old WHIP Upper Ruby project this fall.