

# CABINET DISTRICT COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS MOVING FORWARD

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CABINET FORESTRY Collaborative co-chairs Doug Ferrell, left, and Shawn Morgan work together with other community members to provide input for U.S. Forest Service projects, helping them move forward quickly.

The Cabinet District of the Kootenai National Forest has produced a string of successful forest projects over recent years, according to leaders of the Cabinet Forest Collaborative (CFC), a local citizens group.

A variety of timber and fuels projects, plus a notable fire salvage project, have been designed and approved with considerable public input, and few delays from appeals or litigation. Many of these projects have been completed; others are underway or ready for implementation.

The CFC, a Cabinet District subcommittee of the Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Coalition, is made up of local citizens with diverse backgrounds and interests. They work with the U.S. Forest Service to support timber harvesting, fuels reduction, a variety of recreation opportunities, and protections for wild country, aiming to supplant the conflict and inaction so common in public forest management a few decades ago. Community support, they explain, gives the Forest Service more tools and opportunities for funding and accomplishing projects.

The Cub Fire, which burned about 7000 acres in the Beaver Creek area southwest of Trout Creek in September 2017, is one project in which CFC collaborated from the beginning. By July 2018, the salvage project was designed, analyzed, approved and sold to Thompson River Lumber Company. Harvesting began last summer and will continue this year.

CFC member Bill Meadows, an experienced logger, firefighter and third generation rancher, offered his perspective that the forest land in western Sanders County has changed significantly in the last 60 years. Hillsides that were open are now so thick one can hardly walk through them, he says. Meadows feels this has caused the elk population to move to the valley floor for forage and mobility. Meadows observed multiple elk tracks in the Cub Creek Fire area in the upper end of Emma Creek last summer. Meadows felt this was a good sign, as it may mean they are moving back to their old habitat.

On a recent field trip to see the logging operations underway in the Cub Creek Fire area, CFC members noted most of the area burned in a mosaic of moderate intensity with unburned patches. Most burned areas are already sprouting a healthy-looking growth of grass, helping to hold the soil in place.

THOMPSON RIVER Lumber forester Shawn Morgan explained that logging operations were carefully designed to minimize soil disturbance. In most areas high lead cable yarding systems transport timber to log decks without skidding them over the ground. Crews worked on this project over much of the winter to salvage burned timber before it begins to check and lose value.

Soon after harvest is complete, tree planting will begin. Though Douglas-fir is currently the dominant species, mostly pine and larch will be planted, as they are less vulnerable to the root-rot disease so prevalent in Douglas-fir stands throughout the Cabinet Ranger District.

CFC member Doug Ferrell notes that "Today the Forest Service carefully designs projects to protect water quality, and to enhance wildlife habitat and the future condition of our forest lands. Conservationists appreciate the opportunity to support the Forest Service and the timber industry in a balanced approach to management that creates jobs and helps support our communities."

Morgan welcomed CFC involvement. "The participation of the CFC and the Kootenai Forest Stakeholders has helped in providing public input, which is important in developing successful projects. One of the goals we focus on in reviewing projects is to find ways to increase recreation opportunities in a project area. We also recognize the value of protecting some of our remaining wild places. The involvement of diverse and broad-based groups like CFC and KFSC in public land management is good for our communities and for our local forest lands."

The Cabinet Forestry Collaborative welcomes participation from members of the public. Contact one of the co-chairs, Morgan, 406-827-4311, or Doug Ferrell, 406-827-4341.