

**Draft Meeting Minutes Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative**  
**September 18, 2023 6:00 p.m.**  
**Hybrid Board Meeting Boundary County Annex Building**

**Board Members in Attendance:**

Bob Blanford, Business/ Industry  
Carson Watkins, Idaho Fish & Game  
Chuck Roady, Landowner/Industry  
Dick Staples, Mayor, City of Bonners Ferry, KVRI Co-Chair  
Ed Atkins, Corp. Ag/Landowner  
Eric Olson, Soil/ Conservation  
Gary Aitken, Jr., KVRI Co-Chair  
Kevin Knauth, US Forest Service  
Dave Gray, Social, Cultural, Historical  
Tim Bertling, Boundary County, KVRI Co-Chair  
Tim Dougherty, Business & Industry

Ben Robertson, Boundary County  
Caleb Davis, Office of Rep. Fulcher  
Chris Bachmann, Yak Valley Forest Council  
Cindy Lewis, Natural Resource Conservation Service  
Dave Wattenbarger, Private Citizen  
Diosa Bahe, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho  
Heather Fuller, Idaho Panhandle National Forests  
Kierstin Cox, KTOI  
Marc Kilmer, Office of Senator Risch  
Norm, Merz, IDFG  
Rob Morris, IDFG  
Robert Atkins, IDFG  
Shelby Therian, KTOI  
Theresa Wheat, KTOI  
Wally Cossairt, Boundary County, KVRI Alt Co-Chair  
Xavier Boychief, KTOI Tribal Council

**Agency/Others in Attendance:**

Allen Flory, Landowner  
Austin Terrell, Office of Species Conservation  
Barb Moore, IDFG

- Introduction and Roll Call at 6:00 p.m.

Austin Terrell and Rob Morris presented plans for the Bear Festival during the meeting. Austin, Idaho Species Conservation, and Rob, representing Idaho Fish & Game, collaborated on this initiative. They introduced the Bear Festival scheduled for Saturday, September 30, from 10 AM to 4 PM at the Boundary County Fairgrounds. The festival aims to promote bear awareness and safety in the wilderness and on private properties.

During the event, they plan to offer bear spray training using a realistic remote control grizzly bear to simulate bear encounters. This hands-on experience will help attendees understand the importance of quick reactions when using bear spray. The training will be conducted multiple times throughout the day.

Another aspect of the festival will focus on protecting properties from bear activity, with a demonstration on electric fencing. They will have representatives from Gallagher Fencing to answer questions and provide guidance.

A highlight of the festival is the introduction of a new industrial cider press, allowing attendees to make fresh cider from their own apples. They encourage participants to bring their apples and containers for this activity.

Austin also discussed a new Livestock Carcass Disposal Program, where they raised the funds to buy a trailer for the truck, and a winch will be available on the trailer for carcass retrieval. This aims to help local producers by picking up and disposing of carcasses for free. Funding from Vital Ground and the Safari Club International Foundation, along with a Memorandum of Understanding with the County Commissioners, supports this initiative.

Another station at the festival will educate people about bear safety in camping areas, emphasizing the importance of proper food storage and responsible behavior in bear country. The Fish and Wildlife Service will manage this station, along with a scavenger hunt.

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To promote the event, they have been distributing flyers and advertising in newspapers such as the Roundup, Bonner Daily Bee, and Coeur d'Alene Press. Free food, provided by the Farm Bureau, is expected to draw a crowd.

Throughout the festival, there will be giveaways, including bear spray and electric fencing energizers, and they will have informational displays. The event will take place at the Boundary County Fairgrounds. The festival promises to be an informative and engaging event for all attendees.

The discussion during the meeting focused on the creation of a logo for KVRI, an organization that has not had a logo in its 22-year history. Three logo options were presented, and participants shared their opinions. Option one received positive feedback for its design, particularly the incorporation of hands and the overall layout. However, some members suggested experimenting with different color options to enhance contrast and visibility.

The consensus seemed to favor option one, with a consensus that it needed color contrast improvements. There were also suggestions to incorporate elements from other options, such as using the mountains from option two or adding vibrant colors, like larch to the chosen design.

The meeting also included discussions about scheduling meetings for 2024, with an emphasis on planning ahead to accommodate holidays and other scheduling constraints. This proactive approach allows the organization to effectively plan its meetings for the upcoming year.

**Cindy Lewis** discussed the potential for funding from Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to help mitigate barriers in wildlife migration corridors. The Panhandle region was identified as a priority area, but there were questions about the availability of funds and the specific barriers that needed to be addressed.

Members of the group suggested that identifying barriers, such as fences, roads, or lack of buffers, should be the first step in addressing wildlife migration issues. They also mentioned the importance of the Wildlife Automobile Collision (WAC) subcommittee of KVRI in discussing these issues and brainstorming solutions. The state had previously identified the I-95 corridor and Highway 2 corridor as priority areas for wildlife movement.

Additionally, the group discussed the need for a meeting or series of meetings to delve into these issues further and potentially assemble the WAC committee to help with the process. They also touched on other related topics, such as roadkill data, dynamic messaging signs, and extending fencing around McArthur Lake, along with Copeland fence repair and extension”

Overall, there was a consensus that reconvening the WAC committee and gathering relevant information and expertise would be the best approach to address wildlife migration barriers effectively.

***Congressional Updates:***

**Marc Kilmer** provided an overview of various legislative updates and developments. He mentioned Senator Risch's support for legislation related to archery programs and the Good Neighbor Authority legislation, which is anticipated to be included in the upcoming farm bill. While the House has already

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passed these measures, the timing of their inclusion in the farm bill remains uncertain. Marc also addressed the impending government funding situation, as the fiscal year was coming to an end. He explained that without the passage of a spending bill, nonessential government employees would cease working, and government agencies would temporarily close. He acknowledged the increasing odds of a government shutdown, given the disagreements within the House majority and the expected differences with the Senate if the House manages to pass a spending bill. The looming deadline was approximately two weeks away, leaving uncertainty about the outcome. In addition to these topics, Marc touched on legislation related to Grizzly Bears. Senator Risch had introduced a bill in July aimed at delisting grizzly bears in the lower 48 states from the endangered species list. This legislation was designed to streamline the delisting process, allowing for easier delisting of specific populations while still permitting relisting when necessary. He highlighted the need for modernizing the management of Grizzly Bears, as the current listing process posed challenges and conflicts, particularly around Yellowstone. Marc encouraged attendees to sign up for Senator Risch's mailing list if they had questions or wanted more details about the Senator's legislative activities. He also noted the recent visit of Commissioner Bertling from Boundary County to their offices in Washington, D.C., emphasizing the importance of representing North Idaho's interests in the nation's capital.

**Caleb Davis** provided an update during the meeting regarding the Treating Tribes and Counties as Good Neighbors Authority Act, which recently passed the House. This legislation allows Tribes and Counties to retain timber receipts, signifying a significant change that could have a long-term impact on their communities. Additionally, Congressman Fulcher is an original sponsor of the Protecting, Hunting and Archery in Schools Act. Currently, there are issues with the Department of Education withholding funds related to this act. However, there is a bipartisan effort to reverse this policy.

Caleb also mentioned the potential for a government shutdown and the consideration of a continuing resolution. The status of whether a shutdown or a continuing resolution will be implemented appears to be uncertain at the moment

**Agency Updates:**

**Fish and Game:** During the Idaho Fish and Game update, Carson Watkins noted that hunting season is in full swing as fall arrives. The main focus for deer management is the monitoring of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). Governor Little declared Chronic Wasting Disease Awareness Week, and efforts have been made to raise public awareness through informational videos and outreach materials. The objective is to inform the public about CWD, its impact on deer populations, hunting opportunities, and how individuals can help monitor it. This fall, similar to previous years, there will be November check stations during the Whitetail Rut in the St. Maries area along with Priest River, Bonners Ferry, and St. Maries to collect lymph nodes from deer harvested by hunters. the Bonners Ferry freezer drop off location will be at the IDL office (6327 Main St.)

Hunters are encouraged to participate in CWD monitoring by using sampling kits provided by Idaho Fish and Game to collect lymph nodes from deer they harvest. These samples can be dropped off at regional offices or designated freezers. There is also an effort to establish a new freezer location in Bonners Ferry. The agency is diligent in its surveillance of CWD, especially given its proximity to Libby, where the disease is present.

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In addition to CWD monitoring, Carson expressed concerns about the sensitivity and complexity of addressing wildlife migration corridors and movement, especially regarding highway crossings. He appreciated the efforts of ITD (Idaho Transportation Department) and the State in addressing these issues and suggested a cautious and informed approach to prevent unintentional consequences. He proposed educating individuals about past work, current challenges, and the multifaceted nature of the issue. There is a willingness to share data, including information from the Roadkill database, to inform decisions about wildlife movement. Collaboration with experts and sensitivity to the values associated with big game movement, particularly on private lands, are essential in navigating this complex issue. Carson also indicated that technical assistance and Norm's involvement would be instrumental in this endeavor.

For pheasants, the youth hunt birds will be released opening day and for the general opener, birds will be released prior to opening day. The release schedule is set (<https://idfg.idaho.gov/hunt/pheasant/stocking>) and IDFG will reduce the number of birds released toward the end of the season when hunter numbers tended to decline in past years. The release schedule would adjust based on observed hunter activity, particularly as snowfall increased and hunting conditions became more challenging. Access to hunting areas would be facilitated by opening the gate south of Smith Creek, and pheasants were released in several areas, though they tend to move around.

Following the pheasant update, they discussed the efforts to enhance waterfowl habitat on the Wildlife Management Area (WMA). They successfully flooded wetland cells one and two on the northwestern side of the WMA, resulting in an abundance of ducks, including juveniles and breeding adults. Cell three, located in the northeast corner near the bunkhouse, was drained in preparation for the replacement of water control structures. Complaints about low water levels prompted this action. The drained area had been aerated, and the removal of dense cattails was a priority to improve accessibility for ducks and duck broods. The team used mowing, specialty herbicide, and plowing to thin out the cattails, making it easier for ducks to access the water. The overall goal was to create a more favorable environment for waterfowl, contributing to the success of waterfowl hunting in the area.

***Sub-Committee Updates:***

***Forestry Updates:*** **Kevin Knauth** mentioned the recent awarding of the Smoked Trout Timber Sale, focused on salvaging hazard trees along Trout and Ball Creek roads to facilitate their reopening. Concurrently, road maintenance work is underway on both roads, addressing damage caused by slides, particularly at the 5.6-mile mark on Ball Creek Road and further up where English Creek created significant damage. Hazard tree removal is expected to begin in mid-October after road improvements.

Another significant project is the Katke Fuels project, a fuels reduction initiative in the priority landscape, encompassing Kootenai National Forest and Bonners Ferry District in Boundary County. This project involves timber sales and landscape burning, with field data collection ongoing, scoping planned for this summer, and NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) processes set for later in the fall. A Forestry subcommittee meeting is proposed to discuss project updates.

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Regarding prescribed burning, Kevin noted that larger landscape burns are dependent on weather conditions, with a potential 2,000-3,000 acre helicopter burn scheduled for Boulder Creek country. Other controlled burns and logging operations are planned, contingent on fuel dryness and favorable weather conditions, with moisture expected. Overall, these projects comprise the current activities and developments within the region.

**Grizzly Bear Updates:** The Grizzly Bear Subcommittee provided an update of the last meeting, topics included the discussion of an odor fence, a presentation by (Washington State University (WSU), which was about teaching bears to stay away from areas by dosing them with a dewormer that makes them feel sick for around 24 hours. People asked the researchers questions about how they would track the bears and determine/monitor dosage. It was noted that the summer had been eventful for bears, and preparations for the Bear Festival were underway in the past month.

**TDML Updates:** Meeting is scheduled for October 26 at 10 a.m. at the Annex Conference Room.

Meeting was called at 7:10 p.m.

Meeting Record Prepared by Kierstin Cox