

Draft Meeting Record Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative (KVRI)
Hybrid Board Meeting Boundary County Annex Building
March 18, 2024 6:00 p.m.

Board Members in Attendance:

Bob Blanford, Business & Industry
Chuck Roady, Landowner/Industry
Dave Bobbit, Idaho fish and Game (IDFG)
Ed Atkins, Corp. Ag/Landowner
Erik Olson, Soil/Conservation
Gary Aitken, Jr., KVRI Co-Chair
Kennon McClintock, Conservation/Environmentalist
Rick Alonzo, Mayor, City of Bonners, KVRI Co-Chair
Sandy Ashworth, Social/Cultural/Historical

Agency/Others in Attendance:

Abby Carroll, Idaho Pacific Northwest Forest (IPNF)
Ben Robertson, Boundary County
Bill Lillibridge, Idaho Soil and Water Conservation
Caleb Davis, Office of Rep. Fulcher
Carson Watkins, IDFG
Cassie Olson, Boundary Soil Conservation District
Chris Bachman, Conservation Director, Yaak Valley Forest
Cindy Lewis, Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS), Bonners Ferry
Genny Hoyle, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho (KTOI)
Karen Schumacher, KTOI
Kierstin Cox, KTOI, KVRI Reporting Secretary
Leon Basdekas, U.S. Army Corp. Engineers
Marc Klimer, Office of Senator Risch
Theresa Wheat, KTOI, KVRI Facilitator
William Barquin, KTOI

Introduction and welcome at 6:00 p.m.

Jenny Hoyle, presented on a significant project concerning the restoration of Ambush Rock, a historically and environmentally significant site near the Kootenai River. Jenny, with over 20 years of experience with the Kootenai Tribe and nearly three decades on the Kootenai River, expressed immense enthusiasm for this endeavor, which aims to remediate the area known as Ambush Rock or Kapnuki. This site spans 10.5 acres and is recognized for its unique ecological and cultural importance, including its role as a critical Sturgeon spawning habitat and its historical significance to the Kootenai people. The project was initiated due to the site's past misuse as an unpermitted landfill until the early 1970s, with illegal dumping continuing into the mid-1990s, leading to substantial environmental degradation.

The presentation detailed the extensive environmental challenges at Ambush Rock, including the presence of hazardous materials like PCBs, volatile organic compounds, pesticides (including DDT), and heavy metals, which pose significant risks to human health and the surrounding ecosystem. In response to these challenges, the tribe successfully secured EPA funding for remediation, which involves the removal of contaminated materials and the restoration of the site with native vegetation to mitigate further environmental damage and health risks. The project's execution requires careful planning and consideration of the unknown extent of hazardous waste, necessitating a cautious approach to excavation and cleanup efforts.

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The restoration strategy for Ambush Rock includes not only the removal of visible debris and contaminated soil but also the installation of a clay cap over affected areas to prevent leachate migration into the Kootenai River. This approach is complemented by re-vegetation efforts with native plants and protective measures against local wildlife, aiming to restore the site's ecological integrity. Although the initial stages of the project will visibly alter the landscape, the long-term goal is to rejuvenate Ambush Rock, transforming it from a neglected dumpsite into a healthy, vibrant part of the Kootenai River ecosystem. The project is set to commence in June, with completion expected by October, marking a significant step toward the environmental and cultural rehabilitation of this important site.

During the question and answer session following Jenny Hoyle's Ambush Rock restoration project presentation, several pertinent details were discussed regarding the project's scope, challenges, and methodologies. The project is funded by a \$2 million grant, fully utilized to address potential hazardous material (Hazmat) removal costs, which could vary significantly due to the need for transporting and disposing of these materials, possibly as far as Spokane. The extent of soil and debris removal remains uncertain, with an emphasis on preserving large old-growth trees while removing unhealthy vegetation and contaminated soil. The exact depth of removal will be determined as the project progresses, with historical accounts suggesting the site was once a deeper ravine filled over time with debris.

Concerns about the project's impact on local topography and water quality were raised, including the potential for contaminants to leach into the Kootenai River. Although past studies indicated an uptick in certain compounds downstream of Ambush Rock, the installation of a clay cap over the remediated area aims to mitigate further contamination. Access to the site for debris removal, particularly car bodies, will be from a specific pull-out area, using heavy equipment to extract visible and buried waste. The method for disposing of non-hazardous and hazardous materials, including the criteria for determining waste classification, is still under discussion, with plans to engage with contractors and specialists to ensure proper handling and disposal.

Additionally, the project will involve careful consideration of archaeological and cultural resources, acknowledging the site's historical significance to the Kootenai people. An archaeologist will be present during excavation to ensure that cultural artifacts, if found, are preserved and protected. This holistic approach underlines the project's commitment to environmental restoration while respecting the site's cultural heritage, aiming for a balanced and sensitive execution of the cleanup efforts. The Ambush Rock project, long-awaited by the Kootenai Tribe and community, is seen as a significant step toward rectifying environmental damage and reclaiming a vital piece of cultural and ecological landscape.

Cassie Olson, representing the Boundary Soil Conservation District (BSCD), addressed the need for an Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) Watercraft Inspection Station in Boundary County to combat invasive species. She highlighted past discussions and a recent initiative spurred by the closure of an existing station and the cessation of northbound traffic inspections. After securing support from local stakeholders and County Commissioners, Cassie engaged with ISDA's new program coordinator, Cole Morrison, who offered rapid support and funding for the station if a

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location could be identified. The station aims to protect local waterways, like the Kootenai River, from invasive species potentially introduced by watercraft.

Cassie outlined the benefits of the proposed inspection station, including job creation and financial support for BSCD. The urgency to establish the station stems from the threat of invasive species affecting local agriculture and water infrastructure. With the logistic challenge of selecting an optimal location to intercept both north and southbound watercraft traffic without compromising safety or effectiveness, Cassie sought community input and discussed potential sites, emphasizing the importance of accessibility, water, and power supply.

The meeting concluded with Cassie seeking further ideas for the station's location and stressing the importance of education alongside inspection to prevent the spread of invasive species. She planned to follow up with ISDA for additional details and emphasized the tight timeline for establishing the station to safeguard Boundary County's waterways and agricultural interests against invasive threats.

Leon Basdekas, the Upper Columbia Senior Water Manager, discussed the 2024 water year operations and current snowpack conditions. He indicated that the snowpack was below average but had improved with a late February storm, bringing it to about 84% of the norm for mid-March across the Kootenay Basin. Despite this increase, areas further up in Canada are experiencing near-record low snowpack levels. Comparatively, the current year's snowpack is tracking close to last year's, with both showing an upward trend since the significant late February storm. Leon noted the unusual warmth of the year, with only about a month left in the typical snow accumulation season before melting begins, suggesting a below-average water year is likely.

Leon introduced an "early bird" water supply forecast used to set drawdown targets, indicating a forecast of 5.26 million acre feet of water, closely aligning with the previous year's figures. This forecast affects the planning for Sturgeon pulses and other operational decisions, with the current situation being "touch and go" regarding whether conditions will allow for a sturgeon pulse this year.

He detailed the operational plans based on the forecasts, explaining that drawdowns and inflow management aim to meet specific targets and prepare for potential runoff scenarios. Leon mentioned upcoming weather forecasts predicting cooler temperatures and possibly beneficial snow for the snowpack, which could impact runoff and water operations. He concluded with a note on the absence of a minimum generation requirement for power, emphasizing that flow management guides operational decisions, not power generation targets.

Grizzly Bear Subcommittee Update: An upcoming meeting scheduled for April 10 will address various topics related to Grizzly Bear conservation. This meeting is particularly notable as there have been no scheduled meetings since the previous year, and significant updates are expected to be presented during the April KVRI meeting.

Forestry Update: The discussion focused on the Katkee Fuels project, reviewing recent scoping comments and looking forward to the Environmental Assessment (EA) expected around May. A field

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trip planned for May 16 was highlighted, designed to engage stakeholders and discuss the project's route and impact, especially on private landowners

Fish and Game Update: Idaho Fish and Game shared insights into their quarterly meeting and the upcoming 5-year Elk Management Plan, highlighting major changes including population goals. They also mentioned completed wildlife tracking efforts and upcoming community engagement meetings designed to facilitate two-way communication with residents about fish and game management efforts.

Updates included successful habitat restoration efforts at the Boundary Smith Creek WMA, where significant numbers of pintail ducks were observed, indicating positive outcomes from wetland restoration projects. Plans for controlled burns to manage vegetation and a successful timber treatment project were also discussed, underscoring ongoing efforts to maintain and enhance local ecosystems.

Legislative Updates: Discussions from Senator Fulcher's and Senator Rich's offices focused on federal funding and legislative efforts impacting forest management and conservation practices. An overview of Congress's work on the Omnibus Bill and efforts to overturn the Biden Administration's old growth management rule were highlighted, reflecting the ongoing dialogue between conservation efforts and legislative actions.

The meeting concluded with reminders of the next meeting date and ongoing projects, emphasizing a collaborative approach to environmental conservation and wildlife management within the community.

Next Meeting: The next meeting is scheduled for April 15, 2024

Meeting was called at 7:28 p.m.

Meeting Record Prepared by Kierstin Cox