**Board Members in Attendance*:***

Bob Blanford, Business/ Industry

Chuck Roady, Landowner/Industry

Ed Atkins, Corp. Ag/Landowner

Eric Olson, Soil/ Conservation

Gary Aitken, Jr., KVRI Co-Chair

Kennon McClintock, Conservation/Environmentalist

Kevin Knauth, US Forest Service

Mike Klaus, Alt City of Bonners Ferry, KVRI Co-Chair

Sandy Ashworth, Social, Cultural, Historical

Tim Bertling, Boundary County, KVRI Co-Chair

**Agency/Others in Attendance:**

Austin Terrell, Office of Species Conservation

Brody, Forest Land Owner

Barb Moore, IDFG

Bob Smathers, Idaho Farm Bureau.

Ben Robertson, Boundary County

Caleb Davis, Office of Rep. Fulcher

Christy Johnson Hughes, USFW

Dave Wattenbarger, Private Citizen

Dave Bobbit, IDFG

David Varner, USACE

Dave Gray, Social/Cultural/Historical

Angie Hansen, IDWR

Diosa Bahe, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho

Emily Bonsant, Bonners Ferry Herald

Heather Fuller, Idaho Panhandle National Forests

Frank Edelmann, IDFG

Grey Hoffman, Army Corp

Kierstin Cox, KTOI

Leon Baskekas, U.S. Army Corp. Engineers

Lacey Ramel O'Brien, Idaho Department of Water Resources

Michelle Richmond, IDWR

Marc Kilmer, Office of Senator Risch

Norm, Merz, IDFG

Rob Morris, IDFG

Rick Alanzo, City of Bonners Ferry Mayor

Scott Soults, KTOI, Fish & Wildlife Dept.

Shelly Keene, IDWR

Theresa Wheat, KTOI

Wally Cossairt, Boundary County, KVRI Alt Co-Chair

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

**Leon Basdek,** the Upper Columbia Senior Water Manager for the Army Corps of Engineers, provided a comprehensive overview of the water year operations in the Columbia Basin. He began by introducing himself and the scope of his responsibilities, emphasizing the importance of assessing what transpired during the year. Leon also outlined the geographical context of the Columbia Basin within the larger Columbia system, underscoring the significance of understanding the water flow within this intricate network.

One of the meeting's focal points was the snowpack status as of May 1, which stood at 83% of the average basin. Leon elucidated the unanticipated challenge brought on by an abrupt temperature spike in April, leading to a swift and early snowmelt. This snowmelt trend, which was not only premature but also more extensive than expected, set the tone for the year's water management challenges.

Further discussions revolved around the water supply forecast, which fell short of the required volume for a Sturgeon pulse, as well as the minimum flow criteria for Bull trout and flow augmentation. To address the dry conditions, the team was compelled to draft an additional 10 feet from the Libby Dam, a strategic adaptation to meet their objectives.

Hydrological data, including daily snow water equivalent values and historical medians, were presented to illustrate the water year's progression. These data highlighted the pronounced deviation from the norm, with consistently below-average inflow forecasts.

The meeting also delved into monthly inflow patterns, revealing a stark contrast with the 30-year average. While May experienced an above-average inflow due to rapid snowmelt, June witnessed a notable drop, with less than half the typical inflow. The entire summer was characterized by remarkably dry runoff conditions into Libby.

Leon reported that the April – August period concluded with a total supply of about 4.3 million acre-feet, equivalent to approximately 71% of the recent 30 year average.

. The entire water year was marked by consistently below-average inflow forecasts, particularly during the spring months.

The presentation then transitioned into flow projections, emphasizing the need to control refill to prevent a double peak in the river during September. Real-time adjustments were highlighted as a crucial element in meeting various ecological and operational objectives.

A hydrograph was presented, showing outflow in red and inflow in blue. The team's efforts to shape flows to meet Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) targets and respond to specific requests, such as preventing hatchery icing, were discussed. The challenges posed by involuntary drafting due to insufficient inflow were addressed. Despite the dry year, they managed to maintain flows above the minimum Bull Trout requirement, a development well-received by the community.

Leon concluded his part of the presentation by noting that they ended the water year slightly behind their target date, maintaining flows to avoid a premature drop.

**Greg Hoffman** began his segment by expressing gratitude to Leon for the comprehensive overview and then delved into the critical aspect of managing water temperature at Libby Dam. He explained that their efforts are twofold, involving both water flow management and temperature control.

In 2022, they employed a strategic approach to temperature management by filling the reservoir as much as possible while providing flood storage space in anticipation of incoming water. Greg emphasized the importance of balancing these operations to meet ecological and angler needs. The regular minimum flow for Bull Trout was set at 6000 CFS, which in drier years, can result in elevated water temperatures detrimental to fish. However, their selective withdrawal system allowed for better temperature control, creating more favorable conditions for fish populations and angling activities.

Greg further elucidated the mechanics of temperature management, explaining how water is selectively drawn from various depths in the reservoir. By controlling where the water is sourced, they aim to balance temperature to provide ideal conditions for fish and the river ecosystem. This selective withdrawal system becomes particularly crucial in dry years when maintaining suitable temperatures is a challenge.

He provided a graphical representation of temperature management over different years, highlighting the difficulties posed by the exceptionally warm temperatures in 2023. Despite the challenge of storing warmer water and the influence of abundant sunshine, they maintained efforts to achieve the right balance in temperature within the reservoir.

Greg also displayed graphs that showed temperature fluctuations in the reservoir and downstream at Bonners Ferry. He pointed out that the dam's operations had a significant impact on these temperature variations, underscoring the critical role of the dam in maintaining suitable conditions for fish and the river ecosystem.

The attendees commended the success of their temperature management efforts. Many reported excellent fishing conditions and the capture of notably larger whitefish in the river. Specific figures regarding power production weren't provided, but it was acknowledged that the water year had necessitated adjustments in power generation due to the changing water levels and temperature management priorities.

**Rob Morris and Austin Terrell** provided an update on the Bear Fair, an event aimed at educating the public about bears and bear-related issues.

Rob and Austin expressed their gratitude to the various partners involved in organizing the Bear Fair, which included the Farm Bureau, who donated food for the event. Despite challenging weather conditions, close to 300 people attended the event, highlighting the community's interest in bear-related topics.

They highlighted the various activities and stations set up at the Bear Fair, which included educational and interactive exhibits. These exhibits covered topics such as recreating in bear country, cider pressing to reduce attractants, living in bear country, and more. For instance, there was a scavenger hunt to educate people about items that might attract bears in bear country.

Rob mentioned that one of the highlights was the new apple cider press, aimed at encouraging people to glean fruit from their trees to reduce bear attractants. Approximately 112 gallons of cider were produced, indicating a positive response from the attendees.

The event also featured a station dedicated to educating the public about living in bear country, with various experts staffing these stations. Additionally, Rob discussed the new Livestock Carcass Removal Program and the upcoming availability of a trailer to facilitate carcass pickups.

Wildlife Services representatives were present to discuss wildlife conflict resolution and their services. Vendors from Gallagher Electric Fencing and Bear Vault also participated and expressed their willingness to return for future events, indicating the event's success in connecting with the public.

Bear spray training was a popular aspect of the Bear Fair, with many attendees participating. An animatronic grizzly bear was used for the training, there were a few minor technical issues, but the bear spray training was deemed a success, with plans to expand and improve it in future editions of the Bear Fair.

Rob and Austin discussed ideas for the next Bear Fair, which included expanding bear spray training, providing free bear spray canisters to attendees, bringing in more vendors, hosting food vendors, organizing bear ID activities, and conducting hands-on electric fencing demonstrations.

Overall, the update on the Bear Fair demonstrated the success of the event in educating the public and promoting bear awareness, with plans to make future editions even more engaging and informative.

Following the Bear Fair event update, the participants engaged in a discussion about the new Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative(KVRI) logo. Several small adjustments and modifications were proposed to refine the logo's design. After considering these changes, the group reached a consensus and finalized the design. They collectively selected the version of the logo that resonated with their preferences and needs. The new logo was agreed upon and approved during this discussion.

**Congressional Updates:**

**Caleb Davis**: discussed the ongoing uncertainty regarding the selection of the Speaker of the House, with Representative McHenry serving as the Speaker Pro Tempore in the interim. He mentioned a potential vote for the position, which is still undecided, and noted that the situation is fluid, with multiple rounds of voting expected.

He also addressed the recent tragedy in Israel and emphasized the dedicated efforts of their casework team. The team is actively working to assist Idahoans affected by the situation, acting as mediators between constituents and federal agencies. Caleb highlighted their significant impact, citing that the casework team successfully helped return $3.9 million to Idaho constituents this year by resolving issues with federal agencies, such as veterans' benefits.

He encouraged anyone with concerns or problems related to federal agencies to reach out to his office for assistance.

**Agency Updates*:***

**Fish and Game*:* Norm Merz** from Idaho Fish and Game discussed the ongoing hunting season and upcoming meetings for public input on regulations. He mentioned a river section closure due to mussel contamination and a meeting to discuss its reopening. Grizzly bear-related incidents have been minimal, with occasional beehive issues. There was no acknowledgment from the official online service regarding cougar shooting.

**Fish and wildlife:**  **Christy Johnson Hughes** expressed her appreciation for the Bear Fair, stating that it was a fantastic collaborative effort that demonstrated KVRI's commitment to its mission. She praised the organizers, Rob and Austin, for their outstanding work in making the event a success.

Christy also announced that the Coeur d'Alene office is in the process of hiring new staff. Two of these positions are backfills to replace individuals who have left the organization. One of the new hires will serve as the Sturgeon Lead and will be responsible for representing Fish and Wildlife Service to the Kootenai Tribe for hatchery operations and annual reports.

Additionally, Christy mentioned that two more people will be hired to work on Forest Service projects, given the high workload in North Idaho's forests. These new hires will assist the Forest Service with various projects, including salvage projects. She noted that the federal hiring process can be time-consuming, so they anticipate bringing these individuals on board in January.

**Sub-Committee Updates*:***

**Forestry Updates:** **Kevin Knauth** from the Forest Service provided an update on their current activities. He mentioned that they have transitioned from the fire season to the prescribed burning season. Initially, they had planned to work on some logging slash in the field units, but due to wet conditions, they shifted their focus to pile burning. However, with the weather expected to become warmer, they are reconsidering the possibility of returning to the slash units. The main concern is ensuring that fires don't spread beyond the piles during the drying period.

Kevin mentioned that they have about 1200 acres of piles to burn this year, which is a significant undertaking. He also discussed their collaboration with Kierstin and Theresa to schedule a Forestry Subcommittee meeting to discuss the Katkee Fuels Project. They are in the process of collecting field data and plan to present a draft scoping notice during the meeting, allowing stakeholders to understand the project's scope and provide input.

Additionally, Kevin touched upon progress on timber sales related to the West Side Fire, particularly roadside work along Trout and Ball Creek roads, which have already sold as timber sales. The road work was prioritized to ensure safe access before proceeding with hazardous tree removal. The road should be fully accessible by spring, with the contractor starting work soon. The volume estimate for this work was around 3000 tons, with a final price closer to three-quarters of a million.

The discussion concluded with questions from the meeting participants seeking clarification and additional details.

Meeting was called at 7:01 p.m.

Meeting Record Prepared by Kierstin Cox