

Meeting Notes
Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative
Forestry Committee
May 13, 2021
Boundary County Fairgrounds

Attendance:

Kevin Knauth, Bonners Ferry Ranger District, US Forest Service, District Ranger
Karen Roetter, Senator Mike Crapo's Office
Jeff Gilberg, Private Land Owner
Chuck Roady, KVRI, Industrial Landowner
Duponts (Mr. & Mrs.), Private Landowners
Dan Fischer, Private Citizen
Brad Smith, Idaho Conservation League
Shannon Ehlers, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho
Carmelita Angeles, US Forest Service, Archeology
A.J. Helgenberg, US Forest Service, Silviculture
Tim Patton, Westside Project
Mark Boyle, IDEQ
Robert Akins, Idaho Fish & Game
Tim Dougherty, Idaho Forest Group
Heather Fuller, U.S. Forest Service
Doug Nishek, Bonners Ferry Ranger District, US Forest Service, Planning Forester
Dan Dinning, Boundary County Commissioner and KVRI Co-chair
Carol Kriebs, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho
Beth Bigelow, North Zone, US Forest Service, Archeology
Brandon Glaza, US Forest Service, Hydrologist
Brett Lyndaker, US Forest Service, Wildlife Biologist
Jonathan Luhnaw, Idaho Department of Lands
Jen Anderson, US Forest Service, Project Leader
Matt Philbrook, BBCA
Paul Sieracki, Landowner
Rhonda Vogl, KVRI Facilitator & Kootenai Tribe of Idaho (KTOI)
Karen Schumacher, KVRI Recording Secretary & Kootenai Tribe of Idaho (KTOI)

Opening:

Rhonda Vogl opened the meeting at 10:10 and welcomed everyone. She informed the group that the meeting would be covering the Westside Restoration Project and turned the meeting over to Kevin.

Kevin explained that the purpose of the meeting was to walk through the Westside Restoration Project. It was noted that there was a lot of public interest in the project resulting in a large number of comments. They have consolidated the comments and grouped them into areas of likeness.

Jennifer Anderson was introduced to lead the meeting. A hand out of comments was provided and they can be seen at <https://www.kvricollaborative.com/forestry> by scrolling down to the May 13th meeting block.

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Jennifer reviewed the processes completed to date:

- Preliminary Analysis
- Draft Environmental Assessment

The Draft EA went out on December 4th for the 30-day public comments and that ended January 4th.

All comments received have been reviewed and are on the website and available for the public to view at:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=56888>

The comments are grouped into:

- Recreation
- Wildlife
- NEPA
- Fire/Fuels
- Vegetation
- Roads
- Weeds
- Botany
- Soils
- Aquatics
- Roadless
- Climate

Jennifer reviewed a few comments as examples of how they were addressed:

Wildlife

There was a request to consider a different location for the warming hut where wolverines are not known to den.

A hard look was given to this. They are currently unaware of any wolverine denning in the Roman Nose Area and it is unlikely that wolverine would choose to den there.

Fire & Fuel

Total harvest acres dropped from the proposed action is 647.

Comment received that they are disappointed that the district will not be meeting the purpose and need by scaling back the amount of fuel treated acres. Much of the project area is within the wildland urban interface and the district should be treating more acres to reduce threat of ground fire.

It is agreed that fuel reduction is a really important reason for these efforts but it is not the only reason for this restoration project. They are hitting on multiple resources and accomplishing different objectives.

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They will still accomplish approximately 11,000 acres of good fuel reduction resulting in significant crown fire hazard reduction with those efforts.

In the initial analysis activities proposed were on 60,000 acres. The current proposed efforts should result in a significant reduction of crown fire on about 20% of the landscape. This is really good work.

Karen Roetter asked what the primary reason was for scaling back.

It was answered that there were various reasons; some having to do with riparian habitat and soil issues.

It was asked if consideration was given to the treatment already being done on personal property and any overlap that those efforts had.

It was answered that personal property efforts were not within the scope of the agency to evaluate.

Presentation was given over to A.J. Helgenberg, US Forest Service, Silviculturist, to discuss the process of identification and decision to treat old growth areas. It was stressed that diversification in multiple landscapes was a good thing. The forest plan is very specific – nothing is to be done to old growth that makes it not old growth.

(Carol Kriebs later asked for clarification of this statement. It is that nothing can be done that would change the area from meeting at least the minimum requirements for what is deemed an old growth area. At least twelve trees in an acre that are over 150 years old with a diameter of 21 inches is the minimum – these minimums vary by forest type.)

A.J. addressed the importance of maintenance following treatments and the difficulties faced due to time, money and the number of people available. He also reviewed the importance of having a diversified landscape and the affects to single species that are prone to disease, like Firs.

A question was asked about the thought given to windfall damage in areas of treatment.

A.J. answered that although there is no way to predict windstorms, they do try to anticipate based on past weather.

Jennifer assured the group that A.J. would be available for questions following the meeting and moved on to the next topic.

Roads

Jennifer clarified that this is a CFLRP project and no new permanent roads were allowed. Temporary roads proposed do not allow for public access and they are required to decommission the roads when done within a five-year

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period.

For this project they took a look at the minimum road system they would need and the possible needs for the future. It was noted that stored roads can be opened in an emergency.

Bear Management is a driver for the road assessment and transportation analysis. They take into consideration the burden of maintenance and limit numbers to what is needed.

Although transportation planning/over snow vehicle planning is not a part of this process, they are looking at motor vehicle use in a need versus limited use method in areas needing conservation. Transportation planning is a part of what is looked at. More specifically; over snow vehicle planning. Motorized over snow vehicle considerations is what will provide user groups with an eye toward conservation and limited disturbance to wildlife species. This is being kicked off for the second time and is a part of what the U.S. Forest Service is looking at. It is encouraged for folks to be engaged. There will be more detail by this fall and opportunities to be involved. That planning is very specific to motorized vehicle use over snow.

Botany

It was asked that this project consider proposing that white bark pine be considered a threatened species.

This project is not proposing to cut or burn any white bark pine. The design features incorporated are to provide point protection to any white bark pine that are cone producing. Most proposed prescribed burning have very little white bark pine present, but measures will be taken to help ensure that they are protected. Point protection for burning is very intentional, such as direct ignition around the trees rather than with aerial ignition. They will be reducing fuels around the trees and lighting on the ground with fire fighters present.

Where have they landed with final proposal?

With comments into consideration and the internal discussions, modifications have been made to the Draft E.A. Nothing has been added but some acres have been dropped. One concern was habitat for Caribou. Regeneration units and higher elevation stands caused them to think they would not meet Caribou protection guidelines and thinning would not get them where they needed to be. So, a decision was made to drop all of Harvest units 6, 10, 12 & 34 and most of 53S (which is now referred to as 53 with 31 acres remaining). The harvest drop came to approximately 650 acres.

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Some discussion was had concerning the need for fuel work in units 6 and 10.

It was agreed that there was a lot of acres that could use treatment and it is a give and take. It is important to consider all the different resources. Fuel reduction is a main driver, but this is a multi-resource project with many objectives.

With dropping the harvest acres, two of the temporary roads were not needed (41 & 7) in unit 10. Not as much road reconstruction was needed either so 2.5 miles of previously considered roads were dropped. (2220 and 2220 A & B). Road storage was dropped on those same roads.

This proposal landed on 7300 acres of timber harvest and still no change to proposed burn only treatments of approximately 2500 acres and precommercial thinning of 1700 acres. The total treatment is 11,500.

For weed treatment there is no changes to treatment to nonnative /invasive species. It is proposed to treat 130 additional acres annually.

There is one proposed aquatic organism passage on Snow Creek and that is included, as well as all of the recreational opportunities.

The Draft Decision is expected to be out in June. The final decision could differ. The expected changes include:

- The proposed action map shows some Bureau of Land Management units. Forest service has been working with them to do a bit of timber harvest and some prescribed burning. BLM will issue a separate decision for any activity that will occur on their land and those activities will not be reflected in the Westside Decision.
 - BLM acres are mostly in Myrtle Creek drainage and come to about 220 acres
- Three winter recreational proposed items are not going to be included in the decision for this project.
 - Warming hut on Roman Nose
 - Access road needed for Roman Nose (2667UB)
 - The 2 parking areas on Snow Creek Road

They will defer these until after the completion of the winter travel plan. That plan looks to be completed in 2023. This analysis will be for the effects of those proposed recreational items. That analysis provides the opportunity for those involved in over snow vehicle planning to give consideration to those items.

The next project step is the finalized EA and then the Draft Decision which is

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scheduled for June 11 to be available.

Formal consultation was initiated with U.S. Fish and Wildlife in early April with the expected Draft B.O. in early June.

Once the draft decision goes out, it initiates the 45-day objection period. Once that is over it is hoped that the final decision on this project will be sometime before the end of September.

Tim Dougherty referenced the observed increase in the numbers of people being seen up in the mountains and asked if those increases are being factored into this project.

It was agreed that increased use is definitely something to consider and they have in process a measurements system being used. This is a part of the Pacific Northwest Trail study being done by the University of Montana that has been in operation for a couple of seasons now and this year will include one in the Selkirks.

The meeting concluded with the opportunities that this project offers in terms of cross boundary work. It was stated that there are opportunities to do good work across different ownership like Idaho Department of Land, private land owners, The Kootenai Refuge as well as Bureau of Land Management and The County Firesafe program.