

**Draft Meeting Minutes Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative**  
**June 12th, 2023 6:00 p.m.**  
**Hybrid Board Meeting Boundary County Annex Building**

**Board Members in Attendance:**

Chuck Roady, Landowner/Industry  
Ed Atkins, Corp. Ag/Landowner  
Eric Olson, Soil/ Conservation  
David Bobbitt, IDFG  
Gary Aitken, Jr., KVRI Co-Chair  
Kevin Knauth, US Forest Service  
Sandy Ashworth, Social, Cultural, Historical  
Tim Bertling, Boundary County, KVRI Co-Chair  
Tim Dougherty, Business & Industry

Carson Watkins, IDFG  
Chris Bachmann, Yak Valley Forest Council.  
Christy Johnson-Hughes, U.S. Fish & Wildlife  
Diosa Bahe, KTOI  
Frank Edelmann, IDFG  
Heather Fuller, IPNF  
Kelly Moroney, USFWS  
Kierstin Cox, KTOI  
Leon Basdekas, U.S. Army Corp. Engineers  
Marc Klimer, Office of Senator Risch  
Robert Akins, IDFG  
Shannon Ehlers, USFWS  
Shawn Young, KTOI  
Shelby Therian, KTOI  
Theresa Wheat, KTOI, KVRI Facilitator  
Wally Cossairt, Boundary County

**Agency/Others in Attendance:**

Aaron Black, IDFG  
Austin Terrell, OSC  
Ben Robertson, Boundary County  
Caleb Davis, Office of Rep. Fulcher

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

**Shannon Ehlers**, the refuge manager at Kootenai National Wildlife Refuge, provided an overview of the planned changes and restoration efforts at the refuge. The refuge covers about 2,700 acres and was established in 1964 to provide habitat for waterfowl and alleviate crop depredation.

The main focus of the refuge is to provide migratory and breeding habitat for waterfowl, with approximately 44% of the refuge consisting of managed wetlands. However, the refuge has faced challenges such as outdated infrastructure, leaky water control structures, and invasive species, particularly reed canary grass

To address these challenges and improve habitat conditions, the refuge is implementing a comprehensive design plan for its wetland units. This plan involves utilizing topographic features, lowering levees, replacing water control structures, and removing unnecessary ditches and levees. These actions will enable better water level management, control vegetation growth, and provide improved food resources for wildlife.

The refuge is also partnering with the Kootenai River Habitat Restoration Program (KRHRP) of the Kootenai tribe of Idaho. This collaboration aims to restore and enhance riparian and wetland habitats on the refuge. Restoration efforts will focus on four sites: Cascade Creek, Cascade Pond, Cottonwood Pond, and Myrtle Creek. Proposed actions include replacing diversion structures, breaching berms, restoring woody vegetation, and improving water quality.

Shannon emphasized the importance of these restoration actions in supporting a diverse range of wildlife species, including songbirds, turtles, and mammals. By restoring riparian forests and enhancing wetland habitats, the refuge aims to provide better conditions for these species and improve ecosystem functions.

Vegetation management techniques such as discing, rototilling, and fall burns will be employed to control invasive species like reed canary grass. The refuge will also engage in continuous monitoring to

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assess the effectiveness of these restoration efforts and mitigate potential issues, such as harmful algal blooms.

The restoration projects at the refuge are significant, representing a substantial investment in habitat improvement that has not been seen in the past 25 years. Shannon expressed enthusiasm for the ongoing work and the positive impact it will have on wildlife and the overall health of the refuge's ecosystems.

Overall, the presentation highlighted the refuge's commitment to habitat restoration, conservation, and the creation of a more sustainable and productive environment for wildlife in the Kootenai River Valley.

**Shawn Young** provided an update on the Habitat Restoration Program. He shared videos and visuals showcasing the program's advancements and previous successful work. Shawn highlighted the consequences of human activities on fish species and ecosystem functions, emphasizing the need to reconnect and align the ecosystem within the constraints of modern society.

He referenced Cushing's "Match Mismatch Hypothesis" paper, which underlined the importance of timing and conditions for fish success. Shawn explained that the ecosystem is currently disconnected and mismatched, hindering fish from finding the right conditions for growth and survival.

The discussion focused on sturgeon spawning, with Shawn mentioning that the current year exceeded expectations. Initially, they faced slow progress and low water levels, but as temperatures rose, sturgeon started moving upstream. They successfully spawned 13 females and almost 40 males, utilizing better habitat than anticipated. Shawn emphasized the need to release young sturgeon into different habitats and monitor their survival using genetics.

The meeting also highlighted habitat restoration efforts, such as reconnecting floodplains, tributaries, and stabilizing the main channel. Specific projects, like the Deep Creek restoration, were discussed, showcasing the reestablishment of connections to oxbows and old features. Protection of riparian vegetation and bank stabilization were carried out using fencing and woody material.

Coordination among different agencies and stakeholders was stressed, especially regarding dam discharge, Kootenai Lake, and engineering habitat restoration to benefit targeted properties. Shawn expressed gratitude to Barnville Power for their continued support and funding for the program.

Overall, the meeting outlined the progress, challenges, and future plans of the Habitat Restoration Program. Shawn's update covered successful sturgeon spawning, habitat restoration projects, the importance of coordination, and the need to align the ecosystem for the benefit of fish populations and ecological health.

***Congressional Updates:***

**Marc Kilmer**, provided an update on recent legislative activities and ongoing efforts related to various issues. He mentioned that Senator Richard's bill addressing the Cottonwood decision was passed by the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Additionally, the committee recently had a hearing on fire management, which coincided with the smoky conditions in DC. Senator Rich introduced a firefight bill

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aimed at streamlining processes and designating fire sheds on national land to improve forest management.

Marc highlighted the importance of raising awareness on the East Coast about the regular occurrence of wildfires during August, July, and September in their region. This was seen as an opportunity to emphasize the need for proactive fire management measures.

Regarding non-natural resource related matters, Marc mentioned ongoing work on Port Hill. A bipartisan letter was sent to Customs, signed by representatives and senators from the northern border areas, requesting longer operating hours at Port Hill to match those of the Canadian counterparts. The pilot program for extended hours is currently halfway through, and efforts are being made to make these changes permanent.

In conclusion, Marc assured that Port Hill remains a priority and efforts will continue to extend operating hours and explore other potential solutions.

***Agency Updates:***

***Fish and Wildlife Update:*** ***Christy Johnson-Hughes*** provided an update on the discussions held during the grizzly bear subcommittee meeting of the KVRI (Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative). The focus was on addressing tribal concerns regarding the project design. Eddie Whitcomb will take these concerns back to Washington State University (WSU) to explore potential solutions. One proposed idea is using lemon oil and Ivermectin to deter grizzly bears. Coating attractants with Ivermectin would cause bears to experience discomfort, and treating them with lemon oil would associate the scent with feeling sick, potentially deterring them from approaching such items. However, a study is needed to assess the effectiveness of this approach. Eddie will present this idea at the next subcommittee meeting to gather input and determine whether it is worth pursuing in the future.

***Fish and Game:*** ***Carson Watkins*** provided updates on two key topics. Firstly, he mentioned an incident where two non-resident hunters mistakenly shot a grizzly bear while black bear hunting near Upper Priest Lake in Boundary County. The hunters self-reported the incident, and an investigation took place, resulting in the confiscation of the bear and the issuance of a citation for a close season grizzly bear. Charges were filed in Boundary County. Secondly, Carson mentioned the adoption of a wolf management plan by the commission in May. The plan aims to reduce the statewide wolf population from 1,300-1,500 animals to around 500 animals, in accordance with the 2009 delisting rule. The plan outlines specific programs to achieve this reduction, and the commission will be working on implementation details in the coming months. Additionally, Lauren mentioned ongoing projects such as the Carpenter Lake IDP project and the construction of funnel fencing associated with wildlife underpasses.

***Sub-Committee Updates:***

***Forestry:*** ***Kevin Knauth***, provided updates on personnel changes within the US Forest Service, specifically mentioning the new forest supervisor, Heather Degeese, who brings a wealth of experience in natural resource management. The deputy forest supervisor position has also been filled by Jason Gray. They are both excited about their roles and opportunities to work in North Idaho. The discussion then shifted to fire management and fuel reduction efforts. The Nez Clear National Forest has been designated as a wildfire crisis landscape, and collaboration is underway with the Bonners Ferry Ranger District to

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facilitate fuels reduction and unity protection across the boundary. Adjustments to project areas and NEPA delivery are being considered to increase the scope of treatments. Looking ahead to the fire season, predictions indicate slightly above average temperatures and below average precipitation for June, July, and August, which may result in another active fire season if lightning strikes occur. The impacts of climate change, such as extended seasons, higher temperatures, and lower precipitation, are being observed. Other topics mentioned include salvage efforts for last year's fire, assessing Ball Creek Road for access restoration, and considerations for treatment timing to mitigate impacts on grizzly bears. Overall, there is a focus on addressing fire management, collaborating with neighboring districts, and assessing road systems for recovery and treatment opportunities

***Forestry Subcommittee has a meeting scheduled June 20, 2023***

Meeting was called at 7:30 p.m.

Meeting Record Prepared by Kierstin Cox