

Draft Meeting Record
Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative (KVRI), Hybrid Board Meeting
May 20, 2024, 6:00 p.m.
Boundary County Annex Building

Board Members in Attendance:

Ed Atkins, Corp. Ag/Landowner
Erik Olson, Soil/Conservation
Kevin Knauth, US Forest Service (USFS)
Kennon McClintock, Conservation/Environmentalist
Mike Klaus, City of Bonners Ferry
Sandy Ashworth, Social, Cultural, Historical
Tim Bertling, Boundary County, KVRI Co-Chair
Tim Dougherty, Business & Industry
Chuck Roady, Landowner/Industrial

Agency/Others in Attendance:

Ara Andrea, Idaho Conservation League (ICL)
Austin Terrell, Office of Species Conservation (OSC)
Barb Moore, Idaho Department of Fish & Game (IDFG)
Brad Smith, ICL
Ben Robertson, Boundary County
Caleb Davis, Office of Rep. Fulcher
Cassie Olson, Boundary Soil Conservation Service/ Landowner
Chris Bachman Conservation Director, Yaak Valley Forest
Dave Gray, Citizen
Dave Wattenbarger, Citizen
David Doll, District Water Management
Genny Hoyle, KTOI
Greg Hoffman, USACE
Jake Garringer, Governor Little's Office
John O'Conner, Local Landowner
Karen Schumacher, KTOI
Kierstin Cox, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho (KTOI), (KVRI) Reporting Secretary
Leon Basdekas, USACE
Marc Kilmer, Sen Jim Risch
Norm Merz, IDFG
Rob Morris, IDFG
Shelby Therrian, KTOI
Theresa Wheat, KTOI, KVRI Facilitator
William Barquin, KTOI

- Welcome and introductions started the meeting at 6:00 p.m.
- Presentations:

Brad Smith, Conservation Director for the Idaho Conservation League, presented information on potential legislative initiative related to national forest lands in Boundary and Bonner counties. He is recruiting stakeholders from both counties that represent recreation, hunting, agriculture, forestry, conservation, tribes, local government and other groups to develop a legislative proposal by mid-2026. The general goal is to enhance and protect conservation, recreation, and economic values through land designations such as wilderness and recreation areas. The boundaries of land designations would need to be negotiated in response to input regarding access, management of wildfire or other issues.

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There are also opportunities to exchange private and state timber lands in Myrtle and Smith Creeks for Forest Service lands elsewhere in order to consolidate land ownerships. Some of the private and state timberlands in the Selkirks have trails crossing them to access Forest Service lands. However, permanent public access across these trails is not assured because the Forest Service has no right-of-way or easement. A land exchange would ensure permanent public access. Some of these lands also provide habitat for endangered species. A win-win would be achieved if these habitats were placed in Forest Service management and the state and private landowners could acquire forest lands without endangered species habitat.

Brad announced that an initial meeting of the new group was held in Sandpoint in April. Future meetings will alternate between Boundary and Bonner counties to provide equitable opportunities for participation in both counties. Anyone that is interested in this process can reach out to Brad by sending an email to bsmith@idahoconservation.org.

Leon Basdekas and Greg Hoffman, USACE, presented on spring operations and the current status and future plans for water management in the Libby Dam area. Leon reviewed last year's operation and highlighted the reservoir had been drafted down to 2,439 last year which helped sustain the 8,000 cfs flow through the Fall. This water year has been drier and Libby was on minimum outflows (4,000 cfs) much of the winter and early spring. He also mentioned that this year's April-August inflow forecast for Libby Dam is 5.13 million acre-feet (MAF), or 82% of average. This puts us in a Tier 2 year meaning Sturgeon volume is 0.8 maf and minimum bull trout flow through August is 7,000 cfs with September minimum flow of 6,000 cfs. He also shared that they started the pulse flow 15 May and should have Bonners Ferry flows greater than 30,000 cfs for about 18 days. The anticipated near-term weather has a big impact if we will see river stage near 1760.0 ft. and time will tell. We anticipate meeting our Lake Kootenai refill objective of 2454.0 ft in late July to early August and our end of September target of 2449.0 ft.

Greg provided some context on the current sturgeon operation, pointing out that in the past USFWS emphasized targeting elevation 1,764' (Kootenai River flood stage) for sturgeon spawning. Research and observation of fish behavior by IDFG over the years has led to an operation that targets a stage of 1,760'+ and flows of 30,000' cfs – achievement of those targets is dependent on water supply and timing, which varies annually. In 2024, the stage objective was not targeted due to low water supply.

Kevin Knauth, USFS, discussed the progress and next steps for the Youngstand Improvement project, focusing on the integration of commercial thinning and natural regeneration. This project aims to manage forest stands with high stocking numbers by thinning out excess trees, creating more space for growth and releasing hardwood, aspen and birch. This initiative has been generally supported by public input.

He also gave a progress report on the Katkee Fuels project, including recent planting efforts and expected outcomes. In addition, a recent USFS/KFRI Field Trip took place on May 16, 2024 with 35 participants. Presentations on private and public land to reduce fuels took place as well as visits to these areas, which generated discussion and good questions. Spring planting is planned for 1,700 acres and to date about 700 acres have been completed.

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Additionally, Kevin provided administrative updates, including personnel changes and highlighted the work of the Kootenai National Forest Collaborative, particularly regarding wilderness designation, motorized recreation recommendations and finding common ground.

Legislative Updates: Marc Kilmer, Senator Risch’s Office, thanked Brad for his presentation and said that he had been in discussion with their office. Marc explained that their role comes at the end of the process, at this point Brad is working on the broad public support and it’s a complicated process. He also said that there are a couple versions of the Farm Bill that has been introduced, including Forestry and Good Neighbor Authority that they are following.

Next Meeting: The next meeting is scheduled for June 17, 2024

Upcoming Meetings for Sub-Committees:

Grizzly Bear Sub-committee July 11 and October 21

Forestry Sub-committee: August 8 and October 30

TMDL Sub-committee: October 9

Meeting was called at 7:16 p.m.

Meeting Record Prepared by Theresa Wheat