

Meeting Minutes Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative
February 14, 2022
7:00 p.m.
Hybrid Board Meeting Boundary County Annex Building

Board Members in Attendance:

Bob Blanford, Business/Industry
Chuck Roady, Landowner (Industrial)
Dick Staples, Mayor of Bonners Ferry, KVRI Co-Chair
Ed Atkins, Corp. Ag/Landowner
Erik Olson, Soil Consv/Ag Landowner
Gary Aitken Jr., Kootenai Tribe of Idaho Vice Chair, KVRI Co-Chair
Wally Cossairt, Boundary County Commissioner, (Alt.)

Agency/Others in Attendance:

Amy Pearson, Yaak Valley Forest Council
Benjamin Irely, National Forests Org.
Christy Johnson-Hughes, U.S. Fish & Wildlife
Kevin Knauth, U.S. Forest Service (Alt.)
Kim Pierson, U.S. Forest Service
Marc Kilmer, Office of Representative Russ Fulcher
Merritt Horsmon, Idaho Fish & Game
Michelle Caviness, U.S. Forest Service
Michelle Richman, Idaho Water Rights
Mitch Silvers, Office of Senator Crapo
Olivia Drake, 9B Trails
Robert Akins, Idaho Fish & Game
Scott Soultis, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho
Tim Bertling, Boundary County Commissioner
William Barquin, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho
Karen Schumacher, Recording Secretary KVRI & Kootenai Tribe of Idaho

Meeting was opened by Karen Schumacher at 7:02 p.m.

Introductions were done around the room and then by each person attending virtually.

Wally asked if there were any problems with the draft meeting minutes from January. There were none and they passed by consensus.

Wally introduced Benjamin Irely of the National Forests Foundation to present on the Over Snow Vehicle (OSV) Winter Travel planning.

Ben introduced Jessie Berner of the U.S. Forest Service to begin the presentation.

Jessie provided a brief overview of OSV. The 2015 Forest Plan and 2005 Travel Management

rule requires that the Forest Service designates specific trails and areas for OSV use. In doing so, the Forest Service has to consider how OSV use may impact other recreation uses, wildlife and their habitat and natural resources and then designate OSV trails and areas in a manner that minimizes these impacts. The designation was previously due in 2020, but has been extended to the end of the 2023 calendar year.

Ben, explained that the National Forest Foundation, formed as a congressionally chartered nonprofit, works on behalf of the American public to inspire personal and meaningful connections to our National Forests. Ben was hired by the Idaho Panhandle National Forest to facilitate the group that has been formed to assist with the OSV planning. The group, named the North Idaho Working Group, consists of approx. 27 members. They will hold their 3rd meeting on Wednesday, February 16th.

Jessie spoke about the time line. The working group will pull together a recommendation by June 1st with the intent to incorporate that into proposed action. Then scoping will go out to the general public allowing for comments on that proposed action. It was emphasized that the proposed action is not a decision and that public involvement is desired during scoping. No decision will be made until early summer of 2023 allowing time to form an implementation plan with U.S. Fish & Wildlife.

Jessie invited other working group members that attended the meeting to comment. None did and Jessie asked the group if there were any questions.

A question was asked about why the project, with the initial Map from May of 2019 was put on hold.

Jessie responded that internal specialists, both recreational and environmental specialists reviewed the different ESA requirements for Caribou, Wolverine, Lynx and the Grizzly. They worked on identifying where they could open things up for snowmobiling and meet the requirements for the ESA. They did the best they could to produce a draft map. That map will be discussed at the next meeting and will include input from the recreation person and wildlife person. Jessie stated that the group was asked to put things on hold. She asked Kim Pierson to provide further information.

Kim stated that there was a desire to be in lock step with the Kootenai National Forest who is going through this same process. However, it was discovered that they are at least a year behind. Because the entire forest plan and the ability to meet the biological opinion for our forest plan is related to this, the case was made with the U.S. Forest Service regional office that we could not wait that extra year and so they were given the go ahead.

Chuck Roady asked if the map baseline was something open for discussion.

Kim noted that it was a starting point and that there are opportunities for discussion. She noted that some decisions about places are going to be difficult so working collaboratively will be important. Kim also made mention of the fact that there is still a public process that needs to happen.

Chuck expressed concerns about the map being very restrictive. Kim acknowledged that there are constraints but that the task at hand is to find space for zones of agreements. She noted that the process is going to be hard and that there is not a lot of wiggle room due to the terms of their biological opinion. The biological opinion needs to be met so that the entire forest plan is not jeopardized.

Ben concluded with the reminder of the meeting the working group would hold on the 16th in the Annex building. The agenda for that meeting can be found at [KVRI | KVRIID \(kvr collaborative.com\)](https://www.kvriid.com) by scrolling to the February 14th block.

Sub-Committee Updates:

Forestry- Kevin Knauth- U.S. Forest Service

- There is a lot of logging truck activity is in progress before things soften up
 - Boulder Creek
 - Camp Robin
- Summer Hiring has begun for seasonal crews
 - Fire
 - Biology
 - Timber
- They are looking at possible spring burn windows within active fuel units
 - Planting contracts are in progress
 - Looking at possibly 1300 acres
 - Bonners Ferry district

Kevin asked Kim to provide some input regarding the agencies decision to return or not to return to offices.

Kim let the group know that the USDA sent out a message that they were going to send employees back to office letters but that the forest Service has not finished negotiating with the union. There are on-going negotiations and they are hopeful to return to offices sometime in April. It was stated that they still require vaccination or a 24-hour negative covid test for all coming to their offices.

Kim was happy to share that they are making great plans to utilize the Joint Chiefs project funding they are going to receive for the scattered land project in Bonner County. Kim asked Michelle Caviness to give an update on CFLRP funding.

Michelle noted that they are still under a continuing resolution and haven't received a final budget. It is hoped to have that in place by March 11th. There are 18 projects being considered with their project being number 16. Depending on how the budget comes out they may or may not receive funding this year from that but are also looking at possible infrastructure act funding that could potentially be used for CFLR projects. They are trying to prioritize what activities they would like to recommend to the collaboratives this first year should they get funding and at least be poised for FY23 when they do expect to get funded.

Kim followed up with information regarding the large amount of hiring the Forest Service is doing to stabilize the workforce and meet the expectation to hopefully double the acres treated

and triple the amount of work they are doing over the next 10 years.

Agency Updates:

Christy Johnson-Hughes, U.S. Fish & Wildlife

Christy shared that Fish & Wildlife is working on getting employees back into offices and is using a glide path approach expecting to have people back regularly by the beginning of May. She also shared that she was unable to share information on questions anyone may have on the current wolf discussions in progress.

Christy joined the bear smart working group formed by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) with the hope of building on the bear smart efforts and bringing some of that information back to KVRI and others.

Christy touched on

- North Idaho conflict management specialist
 - Possibly extending the position into Bonner County
 - Possibly including response to black bears
- Funds remaining in budget that can be used for
 - Electric Fencing
 - Other items
 - Possible contributing to Bonner County

Christy did not want to go into further details without having Chip Corsi to fill us in with more information.

Christy concluded with saying she is really looking forward to this years program because it went so well last year. Lastly, she is scheduled to do a presentation on Caribou tomorrow at the North Idaho Working Group for OSV.

Congressional Updates:

Jake Garringer, Office of the Governor

Jake share that the legislative session is ongoing and he had nothing to share.

Mitch Silvers of Senator Crapo's Office

Shared that the offices have been working on the technical fix for fiscal year 2021 for *Secure Rural Schools* in the Senate. They are looking at a more permanent SRS fix looking at the endowment legislation.

Marc Kilmer of Representative Fulcher's Office

Marc mentioned that on the house side they are also considering the SRS technical fix.

Marc also shared that there was supposed to be legislation considered on the Northern Rockies Ecosystem act that is seeking to convert roadless areas in five states, including Idaho and, specifically, Boundary County, into wilderness areas. There was pushback resulting in the hearing being pulled. Another hearing could be requested in the future.

Marc concluded with the effort being made by members of Congress to get a report from the Forest Service done about aviation contracting for wild fire fighting.

Chuck Roady asked if there was the possibility of the congressman working to address the

cottonwood issue. Marc asked to get back to him and stated that hasn't been raised to his, Marc's, attention.

Old Business:

Robert Akins, Idaho Fish & Game shared that the realignment project is beginning with a timber harvest and it is set to begin in about two weeks. There will be a lot of logging trucks coming and going. It was asked if they are going to have signage on the highway to inform drivers. Robert answered that they are working with Idaho Department of Transportation on that.

Wally noted that the next KVRI meeting is to be held on March 21st.

Meeting called at 8:00 p.m.

Karen Schumacher, KTOI/KVRI Recording Secretary