

Meeting Notes
Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative
October 21, 2019 – 7:00 p.m.
Board Meeting – University of Idaho Extension Office

Board Members in Attendance:

David Sims, Mayor, City of Bonners Ferry & KVRI Co-chair
Gary Aitken Jr., Kootenai Tribe of Idaho Chairman (KTOI) & KVRI Co-chair
Dan Dinning, Boundary County Commissioner & KVRI Co-chair
Sandy Ashworth, Social/Cultural/Historical Interests
Chip Corsi, Idaho Fish & Game Commission
Jim Cadnum, Landowner (Industrial)
Bob Blanford, Business/Industry
Kennon McClintock, Conservationist/Environmentalist (alt.)
Kevin Knauth, (Alt.) Bonners Ferry Ranger District, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
Dave Wattenbarger, Soil Conservation/Landowner
Don Allenberg, (Alt.) Corporate Agriculture/Landowner
Karen Schumacher, KVRI Recording Secretary & Kootenai Tribe of Idaho

Agency/Others in Attendance:

Angela Cooper, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho Vice-Chair & (Alt.) KVRI Co-chair
Sue Ireland, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho
Karen Roetter, Senator Mike Crapo's Office
Jake Garringer, Office of the Governor
Sid Smith, Senator Jim Risch's Office
Clinton Daniel, Congressman Russ Fulcher's Office
Ryan Richardson, River Design Group
Tessa Coxen, River Design Group
Tom Parker, Geum, consulting KTOI
Sarah Flynn, Geum, consulting KTOI
Matt Daniels, River Design Group, consulting KTOI
Alison Squier, Ziji, consulting KTOI
Carol Kriebs, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho
Marty Martinez, Private Citizen
Wally Cossairt, Boundary County Commissioner & (Alt.) KVRI Co-chair
Josh Lenderman, River Design Group
Wayne Wilkerson, Kootenai Wildlife Refuge
Evan DeHamer, Idaho Fish & Game
Jacob Hinrichs, Boundary Backcountry Access
Matt Philbrook, Boundary Backcountry Access

Opening:

Dan Dinning opened and welcomed everyone to the monthly meeting; introductions followed. The September 23rd minutes were approved by consensus.

Presentations: Sue Ireland and several members of the project team presented on the Kootenai River Habitat Restoration Project. A link to the presentation is [Here](#).

Sue opened with a short overview of the changes that have occurred in the Kootenai River Valley in the last century. She talked about the importance of the land to the Kootenai Tribe, the role of the Tribe as caretakers of the land, and explained that the tribal territory spans the United States and Canada, and parts of Idaho and Montana. During the early parts of the century settlers escaping the dustbowl, and from other regions moved to the Kootenai Valley and found an abundant land rich with forests, fish and animals. They built dikes and farmed the valley bottom and logged the vast cottonwood forests. In 1974 the completed Libby Dam began operating which protected the local community from flooding and provided power, but it also changed the river and fish habitat in major ways.

In the 1980s, the Tribe grew very concerned about the severe decline and near extinction of many native fish including the Kootenai River white sturgeon. Sturgeon were spawning and depositing eggs, but something was happening after that, so the population of sturgeon was getting older and older, but there was almost no new young sturgeon. So, the Tribe developed an experimental white sturgeon hatchery in 1988. They collected wild fish, brought them into the hatchery to spawn them, after which they returned the adults unharmed to the river. The sturgeon eggs were tended in the hatchery and after a while hatchery-reared young sturgeon were released back to the river. The first Tribal sturgeon release was in 1992.

In 1994, the Kootenai River white sturgeon were listed as Endangered and in 1996 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) convened a recovery team. The Service's recovery plan included the Tribe's hatchery program and guidelines for flows from Libby Dam.

The Tribe's habitat restoration program began in 2002. Initially the Tribe contracted with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to gather physical data to help understand river geomorphology and how the river flows changed as a result of Libby Dam operations.

In 2006, the Service issued a Biological Opinion (BiOp) for operation of Libby Dam to help address the negative impact of hydro operations on native fish. The BiOp included habitat attributes for Depth, Velocity, Substrate, and Flow. At the time, people thought that there were two approaches to saving sturgeon. One was to get them to move farther upstream to where there was better spawning habitat. The other was to make the habitat better for the fish where they were spawning over sand and gravel. The Tribe worked with other agencies and partners to find ways to address these questions.

An environmental group, The Center for Biological Diversity (CBD), subsequently filed a lawsuit against the Service and the Army Corp of Engineers (Corps) saying they were not doing enough to help sturgeon. The CBD thought the answer was more flow, so they wanted the Corp to install more turbines at Libby Dam which would allow greatly increased flows. This would have resulted in more flooding and seepage in the local community. The Tribe didn't think this solution would help the sturgeon and it wasn't good for the community either. Instead, the Tribe proposed an ecosystem approach which included habitat restoration projects that would help create habitat conditions for sturgeon and other native fish to succeed within the constraints of flows that didn't harm the community. The Tribe opposed the lawsuit and in 2008 a settlement agreement was reached that included the Tribe's habitat restoration work and avoided the installation of the extra turbines and flooding of the community.

The Tribe completed a Master Plan for the Kootenai River Habitat Restoration Program in 2009. The Master Plan identified restoration goals and treatments for a 55-mile long section of the Kootenai River in Idaho. Habitat restoration was proposed for three different reaches of the Kootenai River – the Braided Reach (above Bonners Ferry to the Moyie), the Straight Reach (through town), and the Meander Reach (below town to the Canadian border). The Master Plan emphasized a holistic ecosystem-based approach instead of the single-species, single-life stage approach that had been tried before. The habitat restoration consists of many projects, which are being built over many years. The first project was completed in 2011 and 10 projects have been completed since then. The 11th project is being built right now.

Matt Daniels, design engineer, and Sarah Flynn, biologist/botanist, gave an update on completed projects in the Braided Reach. Objectives focus on restoring complex, diverse aquatic habitat for native species by creating a ladder of deep pools through this shallow channel, and restoring banks and off channel habitats. The projects also help to restore native vegetation and provide nutrients for the food web. Since almost all of the land along the Kootenai River is privately owned, the cooperation from landowners has been key to the success of the project. In the Braided Reach some of the projects helped address severe erosion and land loss. After 10 years of work the program has a very good track record of getting things done.

Accomplishments include:

- 6 mega-pools constructed over three river miles
- 24,000 linear feet of bank structures and 13 pool-forming structures
- 90 acres of new floodplain surfaces and 6 side channels
- 27,000 plantings on 40 acres protected by nearly 8 miles of fence
 - Primarily protects young growth from the browsing / destruction by wildlife to allow them to mature
- 93,000 pieces of wood added
- 762,000 cubic yards of earthwork

What is next? All projects are monitored to see if they are performing properly. The team walks them annually and asks if they are meeting objectives. Fish use of the reach is monitored as well as vegetation. There is river bed mapping to note and respond to changes as well.

Tom Parker, an ecologist on the design team, described the Meander Reach, which lies between Bonners Ferry and extends into Canada to Kootenay Lake. The team is coordinating with partners in Canada as well. The Meander Reach is really more like a lake that has been filling for thousands of years. Kootenay lake is what the Meander Reach used to look like after the ice age.

Current conditions:

- Sand levees along river
- Former glacial lake—floodplain is low relative to river channel
- Alluvial fans (a fan-shaped mass of a deposit of clay, silt, sand, and gravel left by flowing streams as the flow of a river decreases in velocity) extend into floodplain; influence tributary morphology
- Wetlands drained and converted to agriculture
- Backwater effect results in reservoir-like conditions
- Limited nutrients and food

Meander Reach Restoration Strategy:

- Connect floodplain wetlands
- Establish river “nutrient ladder”
- Restore nutrient exchange with floodplain
- Increase habitat complexity and diversity (esp. early life stage fish habitat)
- Improve tributary connections
- Restore riparian forests, shrublands and protect land

Overall, there was a significant cut off of the supply of nutrients due to the construction of Libby Dam, diking and conversion of land to agriculture. Riparian vegetation is limited by the availability of surfaces with the right soil, elevation and moisture. These limitations will be addressed through restoration.

Potential Future Projects:

Kootenai National Wildlife Refuge – Upper Meander Reach/Deep Creek Area. The main strategy is floodplain reconnection. Another is routing Deep Creek out into the flood plain. The primary objective of restoration at this site would be to provide suitable habitat for larval sturgeon just below the area where sturgeon are currently spawning. Burbot might also use this area.

Boundary Smith Wildlife Area – 3 potential project opportunities. One option is to divert Ball Creek into existing wetlands. Another is to reroute Boundary Creek back into Canada, into the historical channel where it used to flow. A third option includes pumping water from the river to support other wetlands late in season to help support waterfowl. This area provides potential benefits to Burbot in particular and could help to enhance the food web by adding nutrients back to the river.

At this point, these are all only concepts; they are ideas that are being explored. The Tribe has an extensive review process that includes coordination with landowners, peer reviewers, co-managers, permitting agencies, and many others to help select, refine and develop the projects.

Questions and Answers:

Dan asked how successful moving the fish from areas being developed has been.

Sue deferred the question to Idaho Fish & Game as they are monitoring fish.

Chip Corsi said they have documented some sturgeon using newly created pools which is encouraging. They feel the efforts are making a difference. They (IFG) feels the next question will be will these fish spawn develop successfully? Chip added that from an angler's perspective, certainly fishing around these restored areas is improved. IFG shows a 30% bump in total numbers which is encouraging.

Committee Updates:

Forestry Sub-Committee update provided by Kevin Knauth. His handout is available on the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho website, KVRI documents, [here](#).

FY2019 Sales

Black Boulder 5mmbf to Stimson Lumber in Spring

Camp Dawson 12mmbf to Idaho Forest Group

FY2020 Planned

Boulder Dash 10mmbf

Timbuk Stew 15mmbf

Hart Wall (small sale that came out of the Camp Robin project) 3mmbf

Robin Hood TS 8 mmbf

Total 36 mmbf planned for FY20

Current work is on the Westside Restoration Project. There is a plan to meet with KVRI Forestry Subcommittee on November 21st to discuss transportation analysis and scoping. Hoping to have this project go out at the end of November for scoping. There was one field trip already that was well attended. Decision should be signed in first quarter FY21, approximately a year from now. There are 3 planned timber sales in this project area.

Grouse BMU Decision has been signed. The road storage work is planned to bring this BMU into compliance with the Grizzly Bear Access Amendment. Bluegrass BMU is tied to the Bog creek decision. Hoping for a decision in November. Once that happens, work can begin for road storage and road decommission in the Bluegrass BMU.

Dan updated on the historic three collaboratives joint application for CFLRP funding. They have passed round 1, and round 2 is due the end of November. Depending on what happens, if we go to the next step, there will be a lot more work.

TMDL Sub-Committee meeting will be on November 7th. There will be a discussion of monitoring and what to do with the gathered data. DEQ is not doing anything with it now. It is believed they have only used it once.

Grizzly Sub-Committee will meet November 18 (same day as next KVRI meeting) Wayne Kasworm will present on the 2019 Selkirk/ Cabinet-Yaak grizzly bear findings. We may be getting data that may say we're getting close to recovery. Wayne will be presenting at KVRI as well.

Updates from Representatives:

Clinton Daniel of Congressman Russ Fulcher's office said they are focusing on resolving RAC's. Tim Kastning decided to run for legislature office so Clinton is covering for him.

Old Business: - None Noted

New Business: - None Noted

Closing Comments/Meeting Announcements:

Fish and Wildlife, Auto tour road in the Wildlife Refuge opened this morning. Construction is not 100 percent done, but the road is open.

Chip Corsi of IDFG: Chronic Wasting Disease sampling is in full swing with big game season. Check stations for Elk were done and next is Deer. It is requested that if the public sees a suspicious animal that they let Fish and Game know. Libby continues to find CWD positive animals. Chip wants to dispel any rumors that there is any fee for having your animal tested. Those bringing in samples receive a bar code tag that allows them to track the testing.

Two-year cycle for upland game bird is coming. There are not many changes. Big game season in full swing.

Evan gave an update on McArthur Lake: The draw down was accomplished over the summer. They began letting water out in June and then began holding water back 1st of September. The water has come up about 2 ft.

They are seeing a lot of good native vegetation growth around edges. Drone imagery is helping them quantify forage produced for waterfowl. They are seeing an average of 1400 birds taking advantage of that forage.

Of note was about 2600 birds with a count of 150 coots and the rest duck & geese which is significant because it is usually the opposite.

The next meeting is on November 18th. Meeting adjourned at 8:30.

Minutes prepared by Karen Schumacher, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho