

Final Meeting Notes  
Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative  
March 15, 2021  
7:00 p.m.  
Board Meeting via Zoom

**Board Members in Attendance:**

Gary Aitken Jr., Kootenai Tribe of Idaho Chair, KVRI Co-Chair  
Dan Dinning, Boundary County Commissioners, KVRI Co-Chair  
Chip Corsi, Idaho Fish & Game  
Kim Pierson, U.S. Forest Service  
Bob Blanford, Business/Industry  
Ed Atkins Jr., Corporate Agriculture/Landowner  
Dave Wattenbarger, Soil Conservation/Landowner  
Sandy Ashworth, Social/Cultural/Historical Interests  
Chuck Roady, Industrial/Landowner

**Agency/Others in Attendance:**

Wally Cossairt, Boundary County Commissioner, (Alt.) KVRI Board  
Kevin Knauth, Bonners Ferry Ranger District, U.S. Forest Service, (Alt.) KVRI Board  
Dave Gray, Social/Cultural/Historical Interests, (Alt.) KVRI Board  
Karen Roetter, Senator Mike Crapo's Office  
Carol Kriebs, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho  
Christine Hacker, U.S. Fish and Wildlife  
Jake Garringer, Office of the Governor  
Christy Johnson-Hughes, U.S. Fish & Wildlife  
Jon Moen, U.S. Army Corp. of Engineers  
Gregory Hoffman, U.S. Army Corp. of Engineers  
Scott Lawrence, U.S. Army Corp. of Engineers  
Marc Kilmer, Representative Russ Fulcher's Office  
Micah Ellstrom, Idaho Fish & Game  
Stefany Bales, Office of Senator Risch  
Shannon Brinkman, U.S. Fish & Wildlife  
Molly Ryan, U.S. Forest Service  
Norm Merz, Idaho Fish and Game  
Sonja Michelson, U.S. Army Corp. of Engineers  
Frank Edelman, Idaho Fish & Game  
Scott Soult, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho  
Brandon Diller, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho  
Jeff Gilberg, Private Citizen  
Tim Bertling, Boundary County Commissioner  
Robert Smathers, Idaho Farm Bureau  
Rhonda Vogl, KVRI Facilitator & Kootenai Tribe of Idaho  
Karen Schumacher, Recording Secretary KVRI & Kootenai Tribe of Idaho

Meeting called at 7:03 pm by Gary Aitken, Jr.

Rhonda Vogl read through the list of registered attendees admitted to the zoom meeting confirming that all had been introduced.

Gary Aitken Jr. asked for corrections or edits to the draft meetings from February minutes and none were had. Minutes passed by consensus.

### **Presentation: Libby Dam Water Management**

Gary introduced Jon Moen, Senior Water Manager, Upper Columbia River, U.S. Army Corp. of Engineers. Jon began his presentation by providing snowpack levels. He noted that the snowpack amounts are split (above average North and below average South, in the United States)

Jon gave a well explained overview of:

- Water supply and snowpack
  - Libby water management overview
  - Changes to Libby operations due to CRSO
- EIS (Columbia River System Operations Environmental Impact Statement)
  - Observed Libby operations so far this winter
  - Forecast operations this spring and summer

Jon concluded his presentation and let us know that he would be relocating to California at the end of this month. He was thanked for all he has done and the presentations over the years as well as for his effective action in increasing outflows in February during the very cold weather to support the hatchery water intake needs.

Dan Dinning asked if it was possible to take a guess at the anticipated river elevations at Bonners Ferry. Jon felt as though it could possibly be lower than we saw last year due to lower snowpack in the southern part of the basin. He referenced the Seattle District Water Management website that can be accessed by the public and includes graphs of projected future Libby Dam operations. To access these graphs, go to this link [https://www.nwd-wc.usace.army.mil/nws/hh/www/kot\\_esp.html](https://www.nwd-wc.usace.army.mil/nws/hh/www/kot_esp.html)

Jon's presentation can be viewed on the KVRI website by scrolling down to the March 15th Meeting block here: <https://www.kvricollaborative.com/kvri>

### **Subcommittee Updates:**

#### *Forestry Subcommittee:*

Kevin Knauth updated us on the Westside Restoration Project.

- There is an internal team meeting for tomorrow
  - Forest service specialist will take a final look at comments received from the draft EA
  - All the responses to those comments will be reviewed
  - They will look for areas of concern.
- A Forestry Subcommittee meeting will be scheduled with KVRI
  - Comments will be batched into groups of similarity and reviewed
- An internal check point meeting for staff in CDA will be scheduled

- Input will be given based on what else they see in the Panhandle
  - This will provide consistency in how projects are handled in the forest
- Draft decision will then happen.
  - Draft decision starts objection period for any one that had a comment in the previous reviews and doesn't feel like it was addressed in the way they hoped for
  - Last check for public to ensure the Forest Service is aware of concerns

Kevin said that they are working with the Fish & Wildlife service for this project looking at species of concern like the Grizzly Bear and Lynx in a consult process, concurrently. They anticipate a final decision in June giving plenty of time out in front of the first anticipated timber sale for this fall. The group feels as though they are in a good place despite the challenges of Covid.

- Spring will bring tree planting mostly in Bonners Ferry and Priest Lake.
  - Starting low and working up as snow comes off.
- They will be doing prescribed burning as good weather windows allow for areas where they want to plant trees.

Because it is spring and the ground is soft and muddy, there is not much logging activity but they are doing some decking. Things will pick up as the ground dries out.

Rhonda thanked all for the collaborative work on the Westside project and underscored the importance of the project as it relates to both the health of our forests and the fire safety for our community.

*Grizzly Bear Subcommittee:*

Rhonda Vogl shared that the meeting is scheduled for March 25th via Zoom at 10am. There have been a few meetings held in discussion regarding the logistics related to hiring the conflict specialist and some of the funding.

Dan Dinning shared that F&W has some money available to support the specialist in things such as fencing or other things that could help prevent human/bear conflict. Under consideration is housing the money with Fish & Game with no overhead charge. Monies would be in the budget until needed for spending. It has been done successfully in the past. All of this needs to be worked out and input is needed. It is hoped that the input, especially from the public, can be provided at the next Grizzly Bear meeting. It is hoped that the specialist will be on board in April.

Christy Johnson-Hughes provided the input that the funding is \$25,000 aimed mostly at helping landowners.

Rhonda underscored the amazing collaboration between KVRI, U.S. Fish & Wildlife, Idaho Fish and Game and with the public. Because concerns were listened to, and agencies were willing to work together, this position is possible and aimed mostly at helping landowners and reducing human/bear conflict. It's a very big thing and very appreciated. It reflects the true purpose of KVRI of coming to the table with all the players and figuring out how to work things out, in this case how to get along with the Grizzly Bear.

Scott Soultz will be bringing drafts of notices and awareness pieces for the group to review.

Wayne Kasworm will be providing an update on the Grizzly Bear as well.

Micah Ellstrom of Idaho Fish & Game clarified that the position open for a conflict

specialist will be closing tonight and then they will begin the selection process. Dan Dinning voiced his appreciation to Fish and Wildlife for really recognizing the problem and wanting to help get ahead of that.

*TMDL Subcommittee:*

The meeting was held on March 10th at 9 a.m. via Zoom and was well attended. The citizens monitoring group was discussed.

Ed Atkins, Don Allenberg and Shannon Ehlers are all newly part of the group tasked with getting monitors in and gathering data. Due to a heavy workload, Shannon will not be able to assist with the placement of monitors. These volunteers are being trained by the group that started and have maintained these efforts, Kevin, Jerry and Dave. Monitors are expected to be placed in June.

The tribe hangs on to data that is gathered as does DEQ. Bob Steed of DEQ was going to be at this KVRI meeting, but is very busy. Bob did a lot of the talking at the TMDL meeting regarding selenium. First and foremost, in the news is the issue of selenium impacts for the Kootenai River.

Bob was hoping to ask the board about writing a letter to the Secretary of State asking for reference for the International Joint Commission (IJC) by KVRI.

Idaho Conservation League, Montana DEQ, E.P.A. and the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho have all written letters asking for reference to the IJC which means both countries come together and discuss this issue for transboundary waters. Canadian counterparts also need to request an IJC reference, and we don't know if it will or if it has happened.

Rhonda, speaking on behalf of Bob Steed, asked KVRI if they are willing to write a letter.

Bob also said IDEQ has not written a letter and asked if we would contact his supervisor, Director, Jess Byrne, asking IDEQ to weigh in on this and request them to submit a letter. Bob offered to write it and send it.

Dave Wattenbarger gave input saying time is of the essence because the coal mines are planning to increase mining operations which means selenium will increase. Dave supports getting a letter done.

Dan asked if anything was in the works that this might jeopardize. Rhonda did not know if there might be.

Gary Aitken, Jr. added that anything helps because jurisdictions are making things difficult so any pressure will be helpful.

The board was asked to consider writing the letter to Jess Byrne asking if IDEQ would submit a reference letter to IJC. Dave Wattenbarger said Yes. Gary asked for any objections. There were no objections and this consideration passed by consensus.

Rhonda offered to draft the letter and send to the board.

Gary and Dan agreed. Dan asked the congressionals if they had any input.

Marc Kilmer deferred to his colleagues.

Karen Roetter thought a letter wouldn't hurt anything. Karen recognized that Senator Risch is positioned on foreign relations so she passed to Stefany. Stefany Bales of Senator Risch's office agreed with the groups decision to write the letter. She agreed with the process KVRI is adopting. Stefany had nothing new to offer from the Senator's point of view or foreign relations point of view. She asked to have the points of the letter explained by Rhonda.

Rhonda supplied:

They would write a reference letter to the Secretary of State referencing IJC regarding selenium issues from Elk River's mining affecting rivers.

Stefany agreed and asked if the draft letter could be shared with them.

Rhonda thought it would be possible that the letter would go to the KVRI board first and upon approval could then be sent on to congressionals.

Jake Garringer shared that if that is the direction that KVRI choses, a letter would be helpful for them to see.

**On record** it was agreed that Rhonda would draft a letter to Director Jess Byrnes and that the KVRI board will review. Upon approval, the letter will pass on to the congressionals to see.

#### **Old/New Business:**

Dave Wattenbarger shared that the new board member for KVRI, Chuck Roady, applied for the Region 1 position on the Fish & Game Commission. He noted that it would not be appropriate to ask KVRI as an organization to write a letter because we strive to avoid any political stance. Instead, Dave asked if the co-chairs would individually agree to provide letters of support. It was noted that there had never been a representative from our area. Gary Aitken, Jr. asked what the time frame was.

Chuck Road thought a letter would be needed by April/May time frame so the commission can make a decision with the hopes of filling the position by July.

Gary agreed to put it before the tribal council.

Dan also made note that any individual can write a letter of support.

Rhonda gave an update on the Progress Edition for the Bonners Ferry Herald. The Progress Edition has been going on for three years. Rhonda had a short notice deadline of March 12<sup>th</sup>, which did not allow for the full board of KVRI to review. She drafted the update and the deadline was extended which then allowed time for more input.

Dan Dinning gave input that the statistics related to the CFLR projects would be important for our community to be aware of.

Kevin Knauth put those together and they were able to be included.

Rhonda has sent that draft out to the board and requested that any input be given by Thursday and she will send a final draft out before submitting to the Herald.

Rhonda noted that even though the update is somewhat generic, it reflects the hard work and accomplishments made through this year even despite the Covid pandemic.

Dan Dinning shared information on why KVRI decided not to go with the CFLR funding extension.

Dan stated that KVRI was given the opportunity to ask for an extension of our current

CFLR funding. Members met with the Forest Service a few weeks ago and talked through the possibilities.

Funding for existing collaboratives would be a priority ahead of new ones.

Therefore, the new collaborative that was formed when KVRI joined with two other collaboratives in our Panhandle may be hampered in funding efforts and there would most likely be questions and confusion about why we would request an extension on existing funding AND ask for funding as part of the newly formed collaborative.

For these reasons, it was decided to forego the extension and demonstrate our desire to be a full partner in the newly formed joint collaborative.

Rhonda added this was a good faith move as we had agreed on this in the very beginning stages of talks with our new collaborative partners, Shoshone/Benewah and Panhandle Forest Collaboratives. It was felt we could have jeopardized the funding possible for the newly formed collaborative had KVRI asked for the extension.

Kim Pierson agreed and felt that the reality is if we get the funding for the joint collaborative, there is money that can be focused in all the areas. It wouldn't be walking away from money, it's actually collectively increasing the footprint effect and really demonstrating the great work that KVRI has done, piggy-backing on that and leading the way for great outcomes for all of us.

It was agreed that KVRI is in somewhat of a leadership role with the collective collaborative, having had the experience with the CFLR program.

### **Federal and State Agency Updates:**

*Kim Pierson of the U.S. Forest Service:*

Kim shared that both she and Molly are both very pleased to be here in the interim leadership positions. Kim feels privileged to have Molly. She is a ranger from the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest and brings a wealth of knowledge.

The office is moving quickly to fill Jeanne's position.

- Advertising closed March 5<sup>th</sup>
  - Will go to DC for final decision
  - Anticipated decision by mid of April
  - Expects someone in place in June

Kim also shared that Leanne Marten, the regional forester, asked them to work across the region in different ways. She and Molly spent a week working with all the forest supervisors in Region 1 talking about:

- Regional program of work
- Asking how to collectively plan and help one another
  - They share budget and hiring at a regional level
- How to strategically build on the work they have

Kim noted that it was great to walk in and know that they had collaboratively already built where they are heading as an Idaho Panhandle. She stated that the great work done by KVRI helped that.

*Karen Roetter of Senator Crapo's office:*

Karen shared that in the last Covid relief bill there was 2 billion set aside for SRS. It is up to the Biden administration to divvy this up and it is expected they will use rulemaking to do that. Karen emphasized that there are some figures that are going around with some estimates but they are not final.

*Jake Garringer of the Governor's office:* Jake had nothing to update

*Christy Johnson-Hughes of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Office:*

Christy introduced Christina Hacker who joined our meeting tonight for the first time. Christine is a supervisory biologist in their office and oversees consultation work. The other updates will be given at the Grizzly Bear Subcommittee meeting. Christy looks forward to hearing all the input at that meeting.

*Micah Ellstrom for Chip Corsi of Idaho Fish and Game:*

Chip's audio was not working well so Micah passed on a reminder the commission meeting is March 18<sup>th</sup> with the bigger action item of setting big game seasons. He also reminded the group that the Grizzly bear technician position closes tonight and then they will be beginning the hiring process for that.

*Norm Merz of Idaho Fish and Game:*

Norm passed along that fisheries folks are out sampling Burbot and catching a fair amount of them.

Dan wanted to confirm with Micah that the Grizzly Bear conflict specialist is different than the one for Bog Creek. Micah confirmed that.

*Marc Kilmer of Congressman's Fulcher's office:* Marc had no updates

Rhonda reminded the group that our next meeting is April 19<sup>th</sup> and it will be via zoom.

Gary Aitken, Jr. called the meeting at 8:30.