

Meeting Minutes Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative
June 13, 2022
7:00 p.m.
Hybrid Board Meeting Boundary County Annex Building

Board Members in Attendance:

Wally Cossairt, Boundary County Commissioner, KVRI Co-Chair
Dick Staples, Mayor, City of Bonners Ferry, KVRI Co-Chair
Gary Aitken Jr., Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, KVRI Co-Chair
Bob Blanford, Business/Industry
Carl Petrick, U.S. Forest Service
Dave Bobbitt, Idaho Fish & Game
Ed Atkins, Corp. Ag/Landowner
Chuck Roady, Landowner/Industry
Sandy Ashworth, Social, Cultural, Historical

Agency/Others in Attendance:

Bob Smathers, Idaho Farm Bureau
Chip Corsi, Idaho Fish & Game (Alt.)
Christy Johnson-Hughes, U.S. Fish & Wildlife
Dave Gray, Social, Cultural, Historical (Alt.)
Dirk Mendive, Office of Representative Russ Fulcher
Emily Barnes, Idaho Water Rights
Frank Edelman, Idaho Forest Group
Jessie Berner, U.S. Forest Service
Kevin Knauth, U.S. Forest Service (Alt.)
Kim Pierson, U.S. Forest Service
Marc Kilmer, Office of Senator Risch
Norm Merz, Idaho Fish & Game
Robert Akins, Idaho Fish & Game
Shannon Ehlers, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho
Karen Schumacher, KVRI Recording Secretary

Meeting was called at 7:02 pm by Gary Aitken Jr.. Gary asked if there were any corrections to the May 16th draft meeting minutes. None were had and the minutes passed by consensus.

Gary took a moment to acknowledge the upcoming retirement of Chip Corsi and to thank him for his years of service and the impact he has had with KVRI. All expressed sadness that he was leaving and the hope that he would have new and wonderful adventures ahead. Chip shared that his time with KVRI has been one of the most important and fulfilling for him and expressed gratitude for the shared experiences and accomplishments. Cake was had by all!

Shannon Ehlers of The Kootenai Tribe of Idaho was introduced to provide an update on the Kootenai River Habitat Restoration – Deep Creek project. Shannon shared she is the new manager for the river restoration projects. This is a new position for her and the Tribe. Shannon introduced the Deep Creek project by reviewing that in 2009 the Tribe completed

Meeting Minutes Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative

June 13, 2022

7:00 p.m.

Hybrid Board Meeting Boundary County Annex Building

the [Kootenai River Habitat Restoration Program Master Plan](#).

The Kootenai Tribe of Idaho will implement the 2022 Deep Creek Restoration Project as part of the Tribe's Kootenai River Habitat Restoration Program. This project is a result of collaboration between the Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) and the Kootenai Tribe.

Limiting factors influencing the decision for this project include:

- *Lack of large wood*
 - Provides aquatic hiding habitat and cover, adds nutrients, creates hydraulic complexity and diversity, and stabilizes the streambanks
- *Lack of habitat complexity*
 - Needed for deep pools, pool-riffle sequences, hydraulics, cover
- *Warm water temperatures*
 - Is a stress on cold-water fish species.
- *Lack of connected off-channel habitat*
 - Provides habitat for early life history Burbot, supports native wetland habitat, and provides the exchange of nutrients necessary to support the food web.

The Kootenai Tribe and IDL collaboration make this project a win-win for fish, habitat, and people.

Habitat restoration is scheduled to begin in early July and continue through the fall. During this time there will be no public access to the site for the safety of the public. The completed project will include new habitat features that will benefit fish and wildlife. Additionally, the existing trail to Deep Creek will persist as a foot trail.

The presentation with more details can be accessed at: [KVRI | KVRIID \(kvr collaborative.com\)](#) and scrolling to the June 13 meeting block.

There were no questions for Shannon and Gary invited Jessie Berner of the U.S. Forest Service to provide an update on the Over Snow Vehicle (OSV) Planning.

The Idaho Panhandle National Forests is in the early stages of developing a proposal for over-snow motor vehicle use. The National Forest Foundation has formed a collaborative stakeholder group to develop recommendations that balance OSV travel, various forms of winter recreation, and protection of forest resources and wildlife habitat.

Jessie explained that the group is comprised of diverse individuals approaching the project from a variety of viewpoints. She said that the group has worked very well together but they do not have the details ready she had hoped to have for this meeting. The group will be meeting June 21st to get consensus on some nuts and bolts and Jessie asked if she could return for the July KVRI meeting to provide a more in-depth review.

The hope is that following input from KVRI, the group will be ready to put this project out in July for public scoping.

Gary asked for any questions.

Q: Chuck Roady asked why the project was so dependent on the well-being of Caribou and asked about the possibility of using what the Canadians use; adaptive management.

Meeting Minutes Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative
June 13, 2022
7:00 p.m.
Hybrid Board Meeting Boundary County Annex Building

A: Jessie asked Christy Johnson-Hughes to field the question and Christy explained that although the landscape does not include the Caribou now, the hope is to re-introduce them and that the planning needs to consider the negative impact vehicles and human proximity have on them. Christy also stated that while the adaptive management approach may be a viable plan in Canada, we are not equipped in staffing numbers to support this more people intensive method.

There were no further questions and Gary asked for subcommittee updates.

Sub-Committee Updates:

Forestry- Kevin Knauth- U.S. Forest Service

- Timber sales are picking up as we move into June
 - Sales are picking back up and include
 - Timbuk
 - Boulder Dash
 - Idamont
- Pre-commercial thinning is on-going
- Planting is beginning in lower elevations for Bonners Ferry and Priest Lake
 - Snow is prohibiting planting in some higher elevations
- Due to the higher-than-normal rain amounts, the fire probability is down
 - Our fire team is helping out other places like Arizona and New Mexico
 - When their monsoon season begins in early July, they will be back
- Youth Crew is starting next week
 - Their efforts include trail and campground work
 - This program is a win-win for the forest service and youth
 - One of the hoped-for lessons is that they learn and carry on the importance of stewardship of our public lands
 - Trail Crews are working to clear up blow downs from winter and spring
 - Snow is still prohibiting access to some sites
 - The Forest Service Offices are still closed to the public
 - The staff has been meeting and will continue to meet the public outside the buildings
 - There continues to be an increase in interest for information on recreation

Karen Schumacher shared that the next TMDL meeting will be held June 29th, 9:00am in the Annex building. Zoom attendees are welcome.

Congressional Updates:

Marc Kilmer from the office of Senator Risch shared that the Senator is advocating for higher compensation for firefighters and land management agencies. There is a need to attract more individuals to positions in these agencies and it is hoped that increased compensation will help with that.

Meeting Minutes Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative
June 13, 2022
7:00 p.m.
Hybrid Board Meeting Boundary County Annex Building

Dirk Mendive from the office of Representative Fulcher shared that there is a bill that will likely be before the natural resource committee this week called the PACTS Act or H.R. 6442. PACTS is for Partnership Agreements Creating Tangible Savings.

The bill expands the ability to use shared services between National Parks and local government to allow for easier contracting and reduce the amount of red tape. The example given was for snow removal.

Also, the representative is involved with the construction of a letter to President Biden to encourage the use of other means such as mechanical thinning to continue to deal with the threats in forest fire danger. Because there is a pause on prescribe burns, the letter asks the president to continue to address this issue via other means.

Agency Updates:

U.S. Fish & Wildlife – Christy Johnson-Hughes shared information on the grant funding available through the America the Beautiful Challenge, a public-private grant opportunity for cross-boundary conservation work. More information can be found [here](#).

Christy also shared the status of a court case that was resolved putting the wolverine back on a proposed list for the endangered species. This reduces federal protection but federal protection is now proposed and they have 18 months to work with federal partners to discuss and offer resolutions.

Forest Service – Carl Petrick shared that there is a national hiring event with the intent to use infrastructure money to staff up. One of the biggest challenges they face is housing. There will be several rounds beginning with filling positions and backfilling those positions that may arise as a result of internal movement.

They are planning a meeting with the U.S. Forest Service chief, Randy Moore, in Missoula soon, but this in person meeting is dependent on covid numbers and could change to a virtual one. Carl turned updates over to *Kim Pierson* who shared that they continue to work on GAOA projects (Great American Outdoor Act) and they are fortunate to have a chunk of money going into existing infrastructure. Kim also stated that there continues to be opportunities, new competitive pots of monies, and they want to be strategic and optimize partnerships. Their offices are back to open services and they are hoping to have an open house soon.

Carl Petrick further shared that one other topic of interest is that Senator Danes talked to Chief Moore about the focus on the lack of use of the categorical exclusion for fuel breaks. Carl explained how many of the large areas in North Idaho already include these via the number and scope of forest and timber projects. Carl asked Jessie about the Garfield Bay project as an example of a project that could use the categorical exclusion for fuel breaks and Jessie shared some details about that and agreed it could be an example project.

Christy Johnson-Hughes wanted to offer a follow up on the influx of projects. She is very excited about the prospect of a forest service funded position within Fish & Wildlife for a forest stewardship program. This person will work closely with the Forest Service, IDL and the Kootenai Tribe. It is hoped that this will begin in the fall and will help forest service from getting backlogged in projects.

Meeting Minutes Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative
June 13, 2022
7:00 p.m.
Hybrid Board Meeting Boundary County Annex Building

Idaho Fish & Game – Chip Corsi stated that a letter was received from the city in support of the Myrtle Creek restoration of wildlife management at the Myrtle Creek Game Preserve for fishing, hunting and trapping; and he has assurance the Fish and Game Commission will take up restoring hunting/fishing/trapping in the Myrtle Creek area at their July meeting in Salmon. Chip also said they were able to fill the grizzly bear conflict management position. The increase in pay allowed them to attract a higher caliber of applicants. They hired Rob Morris, a retired conservation officer with excellent people skills, experience with wildlife conflict management and who will likely provide the added benefit of returning back for several years, which would provide more continuity.

There was a human caused grizzly mortality in a case of self-reported, self-defense. The hunters had shot a black bear and were starting out to retrieve it, when a grizzly bear stood up and advanced to within close proximity of the two individuals.

Robert Akins added that they have a contractor spraying the Bees to Bears project and it should be done in a few days. Robert added that the river volumes are slowing down some projects and that food plots are beginning to be put in the ground.

There were no further comments or questions Gary reminded all that the next KVRI meeting will be July 18th. The meeting was called at 8:40 p.m.

Karen Schumacher – recording secretary - KVRI