

Draft Meeting Notes  
Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative  
September 17, 2012 – 7:00 p.m., University of Idaho – Boundary County Extension Office  
Bonners Ferry, Idaho

**Committee Members in Attendance:**

Ron Abraham, (alt.) Kootenai Tribe of Idaho & KVRI Co-Chair  
Dan Dinning, Boundary County Commissioner & KVRI Co-Chair  
David Anderson, City of Bonners Ferry & KVRI Co-Chair  
Sandy Ashworth, Social/Cultural/Historical  
Linda McFaddan, (alt.) U.S. Forest Service – Idaho Panhandle National Forest  
Kennon McClintock, (alt.) Conservationist/Environmentalist  
Jim Cadnum, Landowner (Industrial)  
Ed Atkins, Jr., Corporate Agriculture/Landowner  
Bob Blanford, Business/Industry  
Chip Corsi, (alt.) Idaho Fish & Game Commission  
Dave Wattenbarger, Soil Conservation District/Ag Landowner

Patty Perry, KVRI Facilitator, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho  
Tracy Shottanana, (alt.) KVRI Recording Secretary, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho

**Agency/Others in Attendance:**

Wayne Wilkerson, South Boundary Fire Department  
Eric Besaw, Idaho Department of Lands  
Sara Hall, Community Member  
Mac Lefebvre, (alt.) Landowner (Industrial)  
Tim Patton, Back to Nature Landscape Design  
Becca Lloyd, Y2Y  
Aaron Calkins, US Rep Labrador  
Karen Roetter, Senator Mike Crapo  
Dianna Ellis, Kootenai NWR  
Kurt Pavlat, BLM  
Lee Pinkerton, Boundary County resident  
Don Davis, Idaho Transportation Department (IDT)  
Wayne Wakkinen, Idaho Fish & Game  
Ben Conard, USFWS  
David Forestieri, Y2Y

**Opening:**

Ron Abraham welcomed everyone to the meeting; introductions followed.

The group approved draft minutes of the July 16, 2012 meeting and the August 13<sup>th</sup> fair booth meeting by consensus.

**Presentation:**

Ron introduced Marcel Huijser, from the Western Transportation Institute, Montana State University in Bozeman. Marcel presented the Highway Mitigation Opportunities for Wildlife along Highway 1, 2 and 95 in Boundary County, Idaho.

Marcel thanked those attending. (References are made to Marcel's PowerPoint (PP) presentation). The Institute specializes in rural transportation issues and there are a group of 9 research ecologists who are contract researchers for transportation agencies such as state, federal, national parks, ngo's (non-governmental organizations), counties, foundations. They conduct research projects related to roads, wildlife, fish, and vegetation.

General background information relative to the nation and beyond shows 1-2 million animal-vehicle collisions (AVC's) per year, 29,000 human injuries, and 200+ human fatalities. National data indicates the total number of crashes (all types) remain fairly constant, but the AVC's have increased about 50 percent in the same time period. There is now a greater percentage of AVC's per the number of vehicle crashes which justifies increased attention to addressing these type of collisions. The impacts of the roads and traffic on wildlife include: loss of wildlife habitat due to road construction, road mortality, barrier effects to animals trying to cross the roads, a decrease in habitat quality (noise disturbance, pollution), ecological function of road verges such as grass or other vegetation beside the road. The focus tonight will be the effects of road mortality and the barrier effect, as well as potential ideas for mitigation. (Power Point Presentation on website).

When do we take action? When we have concerns about human safety, species survival probability, and the loss or suffering of humans. A variety of mitigation measures and their effectiveness are shown on PP slide #12. Traditional mitigation measures include warning signs, but fencing and/or animal detection systems, and elevated overpasses are the most effective with large mammals (on average 86% reduction of collisions). In conjunction with fencing, wildlife guards at access roads (a modified cattle guard system) and jump-outs (which direct deer to jump to a safe side) are also effective. Marcel's presentation showed animals utilizing 41 structures on US Hwy 93 N in Montana.

The Western Transport Institute's study for Boundary County included:

- U.S. Highway 95, about 46 miles
- U.S. Highway 2, about 25 miles
- State Route 1, about 11 miles

Tasks included:

- Identify hotspots wildlife-vehicle collisions
- Cost-benefit analyses mitigation measures

- Identify important habitat or corridors for wildlife
- Prioritize hotspots
- Formulate recommendations

The Western Transportation Institute relied on data from Idaho DOT which showed 290 reported wildlife – vehicle collisions, and 2,033 reported carcass removals for the highways in Boundary County (2003-2010, excluding 2007). Seasonally, September through March had the highest count of crashes. Hot spots (PP slides #30-32) were prioritized with the three most prevalent areas all located on Highway 95, and the highest priority area north of McArthur Lake....97% of reported crashes involved deer.

Cost-benefit analyses were conducted using the wildlife-vehicle collision costs (slide #38-40) at the mile marker units on Highway 95 with an overlay of the break-even thresholds for four different mitigation measures:

- Animal detection systems (stand-alone)
- fencing, gaps, animal detection system, and jump-outs.
- fence, under- and overpass, and jump-outs.
- fence, underpass, and jump-outs.

Potential wildlife corridors and linkage areas along with mitigation information is shown in the PP slides #43-59.

Marcel suggested three options to mitigate the number of large mammal-vehicle collisions and to provide safe crossing opportunities for wildlife:

- Most robust: Reduce collisions with large mammals and provide safe crossing opportunities using fencing and/or underpasses and overpasses.
- More experimental and thus more risky: Implement animal detection systems with or without associated fencing and jump-outs or guards.
- Do not implement mitigation measures and /or continue current practices.

Patty wished to acknowledge that the Idaho Department of Transportation has had representatives at many of the KVRI Wildlife Auto Collision committee meetings so we continue to work cooperatively.

She also expressed that the committee is not about knowing what to do at this point; there is no pre-conceived idea that we should do something. In the past when Don Davis (ITD) worked with a community group to look at long term planning for the McArthur Lake , it was discussed that if road work in that area ever came to fruition that we would want to make sure to have ideas considered for that span of roadway. We have a lot more questions than we do answers. Last winter/spring we discussed increasing the sight distance through cutting shrubs and trees alongside the road. Increasing the sight distance for drivers may reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions, but that activity may also increase the barrier effect of roads and traffic to wildlife. In the McArthur Lake area trees have been thinned to allow for the possibility of having better visibility of animals moving in the area. We recognize that most of the area is in private land ownership and has a number of driveways. We don't have answers, but now the committee has more information to think about.

Patty wanted folks to know what brought us to this point of Marcel's presentation and acknowledged Rebecca for the grant (that had been passed on to her group – Yellowstone to Yukon) that was made available to us as a committee. We appreciate the study's information to assist us in better understanding the situation.

Questions to Marcel and answers

Q: What is the dollar value of the wildlife collisions in this county?

A: Approximately \$1.6 million dollars annually (2000 carcasses in 8 years = 250 carcass a year x average cost of crash \$6,600 = \$1.6 million).

Q: When there are fields and driveways along the road ways does fencing just disperse the collision problem?

A: It's difficult to say as this is likely site specific, but the average diameter of the home range of a white-tailed deer is about one km, so extending the fence at least 1 km in both directions from a hotspot should keep most of the animals that approach the road at the hotspot from crossing at the fence ends.

Q: When structures are put in are they also installing structures for crossing the railroads or are they just shifting the mortality to the railroad?

A: It is a challenge. We don't have a lot of data on the animal-railroad collisions, but we do know that wildlife-train collisions can be numerous and they are a particular concern for grizzly bears. The challenge is to have procedures in place that investigate the extend of the problem of railroads for wildlife and that encourage railroad companies to implement mitigation. Another challenge is to coordinate between different agencies and companies for mitigation along different transportation corridors (e.g. highways and railroads) in the same area.

Q: Is there any correlation to the increase in accidents and deer?

A: White tail deer populations have gone up considerably in different parts of the lower 48 and with wider and multi-lane roads we have seen the driving speeds and wildlife-vehicle collisions increase.

Q: When we look at the cost we look at transportation funding the mitigation. Is there another way, perhaps insurance companies?

A: Insurance companies typically increase premiums in high risk areas. On the ground mitigation would not just benefit their clients but also their competitor's clients. So, insurance companies may be most interested in vehicle based mitigation (e.g. long range animal detection systems) unless they form an alliance where the companies involved would cover a large proportion of the insured in an area.

Patty advised the committee will continue to meet, and that we're not looking in any particular direction, but we will talk with ITD to see if there is anything to do to make things better.

Patty thanked Marcel for coming from Missoula and preparing the report for us and Rebecca for the grant funds to look into this issue.

### **Committee Updates:**

Forestry Committee - CFLRP projects are going forward and we'll have updates in Oct and Nov on those.

TMDL Committee - will be collecting their monitors at the end of the month and they will be meeting next on Oct 12<sup>th</sup>. (has since changed to Oct. 16<sup>th</sup>)

Grizzly Bear Committee – Wayne Wakkinen, IDFG, had applied for grant with the Panhandle Resource Advisory Committee for Grizzly Bear study information and we'll contact him share information at a Grizzly Bear Committee meeting in the future.

The Fair booth was a success and thank you to everyone that helped, we had fun doing it.

The Tribe hired a new assistant, Janet Satchwell; Janet will be working with KVRI, and as a Program Assistant to the Environmental Department as well as in other areas.

**New Business:**

Thursday evening, September 20<sup>th</sup>, we have a great opportunity to hear Dr. Russ Graham, Research Forester, from the Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station, and Dr. Penny Morgan, Professor of Natural Resources, University of Idaho, for their presentation on *Defining and Understanding Mixed Severity Fire Regime Forests*. This is hosted by KVRI and has been advertised, in hopes that many will attend.

Dan Dinning has lined up speakers for the October 15th KVRI meeting for an update on the wolverine study, and the November meeting will have a Burbot Committee update.

**Correspondence:**

The International Kootenay Lake Board of Control will hold their annual public meeting, September 26<sup>th</sup>, at 7:30 p.m. at the Kootenai River Inn.

Meeting adjourned at 8:37p.m.

*Additional information received October 4, 2012.*

*The final report from Marcel Huijser, of the Western Transportation Institute, Montana State University, is downloadable from: <http://www.coe.montana.edu/wti/wwwshare/for%20Becca/>*

*Marcel presented the Highway Mitigation Opportunities for Wildlife along Highway 1, 2 and 95 in Boundary County, Idaho.*