

Meeting Notes
Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative
Forestry Committee
September 18, 2017, 10:30 a.m.
Kootenai Tribe of Idaho

Attendance:

Kevin Knauth, Bonners Ferry Ranger District, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
Doug Nishek, Bonners Ferry Ranger District, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
Kevin Greenleaf, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho
Brad Smith, Idaho Conservation League (ICL)
Emily Cleveland, Idaho Conservation League (ICL)
Karen Roetter, Senator Mike Crapo's office
Sid Smith, Senator Jim Risch's office
Judy Morbeck, Congressman Raul Labrador's office
Erin Mader, Idaho Forest Group (IFG)
Norm Merz, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho (KTOI)
Ron Abraham, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho (KTOI)
Evan DeHamer, Idaho Department of Fish & Game (IDFG)
Jonathan Luhnnow, Idaho Department of Lands (IDL)
Patty Perry, KVRI Facilitator & KTOI
Sherrie Cossairt, KVRI Recording Secretary & KTOI

Opening:

Patty Perry opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. Introductions followed.

Update on Boulder Project Kevin Knauth

Kevin K. explained that the rest of the team was at the Buckskin Saddle Project Checkpoint 1 meeting in Sandpoint. That meeting was delayed a week and ended up being today also.

Kevin K. outlined his presentation: General items, North Zone Timber Sale Schedule through FY 2021, and the Checkpoint 4 meeting for Boulder Creek and the Boulder Creek Project Draft EA.

General Information: Kevin Knauth

Fire Restriction: It is most likely the Stage 2 Fire Restrictions will be dropped by Wednesday, Sept. 20th.

Katka Road Washout Repair: The contractor has been hired to repair the road; Nov. 15th deadline. It will be repaired and drivable and next summer will be paved. That will allow access into Boulder and allow the Federal Highway contractor to fix the other road washout near the ghost town. That contract should go out in early spring and be completed by next summer.

Kevin K. explained that the Federal Highways uses Emergency Funding available, so it doesn't cost the Forest Service anything but they are under their time schedule. They do the NEPA, contract and do the work. We can nudge them but in general it is on their time schedule so it's delayed a bit. But it will save hundreds of thousands of dollars.

There is also the potential to be reimbursed for the Katka work –we can apply for that, because they would have had to fix the Katka road to be able to fix the Boulder Creek Washout. So if we fix it before they do, we can apply for the Funding and be reimbursed. The contract was \$ 129,000.

Brad Smith asked if Lightning Creek will be fixed too. Kevin stated that it is on the same time line as Boulder; Boulder will be first and Lightning Creek right behind it and completed by next summer.

Kevin K. explained the challenge with ERFO (Emergency Relief for Federally Owned Roads) dollars and Lightning Creek; the money is only for bringing it back to the state it was before. If we bring in some of our own money we can improve and upgrade the road.

Boulder Creek Checkpoint 4 -Checkpoint 4 is to review the Boulder Creek Project Draft EA with Mary Farnsworth, Forest Supervisor, and the staff at the Supervisor's Office. Giving them the opportunity to ask questions and getting us to a place where we are ready to release it for comments. That will take place tomorrow. (Sept 19) There are no changes expected at this point. The Draft is still a Draft. The NEPA Coordinator at the Supervisor's Office, Karl Dekome, has taken a preliminary look but we have to wait for his final review before it is released. Kevin verified that Mary was aware of all the options before this checkpoint meeting.

North Zone Timber Sale Schedule Spreadsheet - Kevin Knauth

This spreadsheet looks at our sales program, primarily vegetation treatment, not NEPA Projects; the operation side, decisions, layout and prep work, and sale timeline.

FY 2017

Deer Stewardship- Stewardship sale -4thqtr FY17 - 15mmbf

The first sale out of Deer Creek, contractors are looking at it now, getting packages together, closes next month (Oct 2017)

With a Stewardship Sale they build a list of mandatory service contract items such as road work, replacing bridges, replacing AOPs (Aquatic Organism Passage), trail work, planting, thinning, pruning etc. As long as they meet with the bids minimum value, all of these contract items will occur, once its awarded those things go under contract immediately. Optional items are on another list; bid premium goes up we buy into those optional service items as well, primarily they happen on the unit where the stewardship sale was, but can be anywhere on the North Zone. There is plenty of work to do right here on the NEPA ready areas and even in past project areas.

Patty P. asked if the optional items listed in this project are on this District. Kevin stated that they are. This work has to be on NEPA cleared actions. We can look back at Twenty Mile or Hellroaring Projects that have NEPA clearance for work and we didn't have the money at the time but now this stewardship can provide the money to do that work in those other project areas. The rest of the Zone doesn't have NEPA ready areas as yet.

Patty agreed that that was a good thing; keeping in mind with the CFLR, these projects are an outcome of KVRI and the intention of all of that was that that work would be done on this District. Patty also asked about the project up North (Eastport project) and its proposed helicopter logging, at the time we

couldn't sell or get the work done. Where are we with that? Can we use these dollars to help with that or is it worthwhile? Kevin said they looked at that possibility and still couldn't get enough interest. It is not simply a money thing. It was logistics and the highway was involved. It is not the best opportunity, so they are not currently looking at that right now.

FY18

Deer Placer-Traditional timber sale, 3rdqtr FY18- 4mmbf

Double - D -Traditional timber sale, 4thqtr FY18- 6mmbf

These were broke into two sales for the opportunity to offer lower volume sales to get the smaller operators into the market.

FY19

Robin Hood-Traditional timber sale, 2ndqtr FY19- 12mmbf

Camp Dawson-Stewardship sale- 3rdqtr FY19- 15mmbf-as well as the stewardship items

The NEPA strike team out of Coeur d'Alene is working on both of these projects.

Patty asked Kevin K. to give a brief overview of the Good Neighbor Authority – GNA. Kevin explained that it is an arrangement the Forest Service has with the State of Idaho to assist them in getting an accelerated program of work out there. The State could actually layout the units in the area, contract out the NEPA, see the NEPA all the way through, sell it and administer it. The Forest Service anticipates it to be a good tool to help them accelerate out the work load with the same number of personnel. They are still working on how it works best.

FY20- All three sales are out of the Boulder Project.

Black Boulder- GNA (Good Neighbor Authority) - 1stqtr-FY20-8mmbf

The Forest Service has done all the NEPA for it and they are anticipating Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) to carry out the timber sale action for them. Jonathan added IDL is looking at picking up the ball after the NEPA is completed and utilize the timber sale option processes and administration.

Discussion followed about GNA and how the legislation reads: the projects cannot involve road work; road maintenance can occur but not reconstruction or new construction; also may not include decommissioning or storing roads.

Patty added that we had a lot of those items in the Boulder project and could we have issues with the Black Boulder GNA. So we could possibly be working through that process in Black Boulder.

Doug stated that it was possible. Brad S. also added that some of the road work could be done under a separate CE category unless the legislation is fixed before then.

Kevin added that the goal of the GNA was to accelerate restoration work.

Green Gables- Traditional timber sale -1st qtr-FY20- 10mmbf

North Star Stew- Stewardship- 3rdqtr FY20 -17mmbf

Kevin stated that between the three sale areas they are comfortable anticipating a total of 30mmbf.

FY2021

They are exploring small sales opportunities in the out years. Buckskin Saddle is a large project in the Sandpoint area that will get very busy as they move in to FY21 and FY22. Things will get leaner here as the CFLRP program comes to an end and the work is going to start spreading to other units across the North Zone.

Patty asked if the two (2) Caribou and Trout Ball projects on the list will be slow moving because other Districts are coming on board with big projects now.

Kevin explained that they want to get a better look at the whole Westside project and how best to group up those areas and what kind of NEPA to do. They are a little ways from getting all the private landowners on board to know where they will go. The other thing is that the Bog Creek road NEPA has taken longer than anticipated. The EA may have to be an EIS and that will be a longer delay which leaves the Blue Grass BMU up in the air. They would like that road situation with that BMU to be sorted out before they look at Trout Ball. There have been leadership changes and completion dates keep changing.

Norm M. asked if we will meet the 2019 Grizzly Bear Access Amendment deadline with this delay.

Kevin K. stated that it was going to be tight. They have done their part to support that NEPA. If Blue Grass can be sorted out, the whole Selkirk BMUs will be in line. And our hope is then to work with Fish and Wildlife Service with a little more flexibility in working within those BMUs. We need that in Trout/Ball.

Brad S. asked for a graph showing the CFLRP sold and completed projects. Patty agreed having sales dates and expected completion dates would be helpful. Kevin also agreed and said he would look into it.

North Zone Timber Sale Schedule Spreadsheet is available online at www.kootenai.org.

Boulder Creek Restoration Project Draft EA- Doug Nishek

Doug began by sharing pictures of the Boulder Projects in a Power Point Presentation.

Pictures included: views from Black Mountain looking into the Boulder meadows looking south; a map of the watershed; Black Mountain lookout and the communication equipment; historical pictures of the area from the 1930's showing the effects of the 1910 fire; the effects of mining in the area; stand

condition pictures, old growth pictures and locations; road conditions; and the Boulder Meadow fences used to control illegal ATV use.

These slides are available for viewing on the website at www.kootenai.org

Doug continued with the Boulder Creek Restoration Project EA. The objective is to try to answer the questions of the effects on the landscape. We know where the project is and why we are there. We have to get the Grizzly Bear BMU in compliance by 2019. We have roads to deal with to meet that compliance. This is a 40,000 acre management area with 40% of General Forest and 60% Backcountry.

Purpose and Need of the Project

Aquatics-Some of the roads are in bad shape, need to reduce the risk of sediment that is entering the stream systems from roads, trails and recreation sites.

Fires & Fuels- We need to protect the communication site infrastructure and Black Mountain Lookout tower from potential wildfire damage. We need to provide for safe access along the road and also a way to reintroduce fire back into the ecosystem. The last big fire was in 1910.

Changing Forest Vegetation to Improve Landscape Resiliency – We want to have a forest that can handle what mother nature throws at it in the next 30 years; we want to restore White Bark Pine; reduce Lodgepole pine stands with harvest or prescribed burning; take care of dry site old growth stands as there are only 10% left across the Forest; create openings in the Lodgepole areas; upset the continuity of the fuels; create seed beds for White Bark Pine to get started in and get the ecosystem as a whole growing back to where it should be where we can- even though the access is poor and it is a large drainage.

Wildlife Habitat- We have to meet the Grizzly Bear Access Amendment by 2019, we need to store roads, create vegetation structure and composition that will compliment Grizzly Bear habitat.

Recreation – We want to have a more comprehensive plan to deal with the areas around the heritage sites.

Invasive Plants-The need to control the existing noxious weed populations.

Scenic Integrity-We want to restore the natural vegetation patterns which historically were shaped by wildfire not the obvious geometric shapes of the harvest in the 70's and 80's when viewed from a distance such as the Clifty View and Black Mountain viewpoints.

Local Economy-While doing this restoration we would like to bolster the local economy.

Patty stated that to give the group an understanding what you can actual do at the end of the day in a project like this is we spent time looking at a 40,000 acre block and an EA, what is the acreage total that is going to be treated?

According to Doug, the timber harvest is 3433 acres and the planned prescribed burn is 7400 acres.

Norm M. added it also is important to note that just because you analyze an area, there are good reasons not to do things in certain areas; certain stands may already be how you want them to be or on their trajectory.

Doug referred to the map to show the 40,000 acre unit watershed including the two Roadless areas. When you start looking at the entire landscape, we are doing what we can without very many roads. Those restrictions answer the question for us as to what we can do with what treatments. He also showed the group the harvest areas and burning areas and pointed out the WUI (Wildland Urban Interface) area in the project.

Doug also added that the Cow Creek community watershed gets their water from the drainage north of Clifty and Katka so we can try to break up the continuity of the fuels on the south aspect side. Most of the fires head from south to north. He showed the Roadless area goes all the way to Sandpoint and Lightning Creek. He also noted that the numbered units are for comment references.

Proposed Action

- Alternative 1- No action alternative, Forest composition and structure would trend away from desired conditions
- Alternative 2- Includes the prescribed burn units, would improve Forest structure, and reduce the amount of Lodgepole pine
- Alternative 3- Excludes the prescribed burn units, would improve Forest structure (letters from the public were adamant they didn't want the Forest Service to do anything in either of the Roadless areas)

We need to take credit for (and KVRI spent a lot of time on this) the Road system in the project. We looked at opportunities to store the roads to meet the Grizzly Bear Access Amendment resulting in approximately 13 miles of road storage. It will close the roads to traffic, make it a low risk to aquatics, but if we get a fire or emergency, we can open it and take care of business.

Ecological Standpoint

The White Bark Pine stand habitat where we are hoping to get some regeneration, are on Clifty trail, Katka pass and some others on the Iron and Buck Mountain ridge. Fuels are light with grass and rock there and we don't expect the fire to reach those. There are 4100 acres of old growth stands in the project area, the main dry site old growth stand is above the ghost town that they plan to treat.

Norm M. stated that it is a positive that some of your old growth dry site treatments link up to existing sites, enhancing the landscape in those areas. Brad S. shared that there is a project on the Sandpoint District under, Jennifer Costich-Thompson, which is exploring the possibility of seed caching; trying to replicate the work of the nutcrackers. It will be interesting to see how successful that proves to be. There is also discussion in the works about volunteers to do the caching.

Road Treatment

- Reconstruction and maintenance 76 miles
- Temporary road construction 3.2 miles

- Storage 13.4 miles
- Decommission 0.7

Doug discussed briefly the Road Details listed in the project adding that all the alternatives will still meet the Access Amendment. Patty stated she would like to add that Brett Lyndaker worked very hard on this for a long time to make sure we could do what we needed to do not only meet the Grizzly Bear Access Amendment but also what was best for community concerns for access in the area.

Openings Over 40 Acres

Doug explained there will be some openings over 40 acres in the project that will need the Regional Forester's authorization.

Numbers on regeneration harvest

- Commercial Harvest 3433 acres
- Pre-Commercial Thinning 806 acres
- Mechanical treatments (Tractor, skyline, combination (skyline & tractor), helicopter)
- Fuels Treatment (includes prescribed burn 7407 acres)
- Total Treatment- 10, 862 acres or 10% of the watershed area.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated

We looked at going into Roadless Areas with helicopter (1600 acres) and ground base (350 acres). We are just taking credit for what we could have done to try and address the fuels and vegetation issue even though we had the issues that the Inventoried Roadless Areas bring into the mix. It would have been one way to fix the problem but it came with a cost.

The other alternative was if we limited the forest openings to 40 acres or less. It really ties hands as far vegetation management and being able to fix visuals especially with the expanse of lodge pole we have.

Further opportunities

Aquatics-Beaver habitat restoration in Boulder Meadows using beaver dam analogs (starter beaver dams) Three AOPs were identified for replacement.

Recreation-Improve Road #2209 to allow motorized access to the Kootenai River Walk Trail, improve other trailheads and access, develop interpretive trails etc.

Noxious weeds-They will be treating noxious weed populations on Forest Service Roads and leading to Boulder Meadows. Weed control activities will be using existing management direction.

Doug replied to the last couple of questions about the EA concerning actual treatment done around the communication site for fire prevention and a request for a reference note showing Grizzly Bear Habitat Core creation included in the specialists report.

Patty P. noted that this same presentation will be given by Doug and Kevin to the KVRI Board tonight. (Sept. 18). And asked Kevin K. to let the committee know of the outcome of the Checkpoint Meeting tomorrow (Sept 19) with Mary and the Supervisor's Office. Patty also asked if the committee was comfortable in recommending to the KVRI Board that Forest Service ahead with preparations to release the Draft EA, the group concurred.

Meeting was adjourned at 12:15 p.m.

Sherrie Cossairt

KTOI/KVRI Admin. Assistant