

Meeting Notes
Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative
Forestry Committee
March 11th, 2020 – 1:15PM
Kootenai Tribal Office

Attendance:

Angela Cooper, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho and KVRI (alt)Co-Chair
Kevin Knauth, Bonners Ferry Ranger District, US Forest Service (USFS)-District Ranger
Doug Nishek, Bonners Ferry Ranger District, US Forest Service (USFS)-Planning Forester
Dan Dinning, Boundary County Commissioner and KVRI Co-chair
Ed Koberstein, Bonners Ferry Ranger District, US Forest Service (USFS)-Timber Management
Carol Kriebs, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho
Beth Bigelow, North Zone, US Forest Service (USFS) - Archeology
Lisa Ailport, City of Bonners Ferry
Brandon Glaza, USFS, Hydrologist
Steve Petesch, USFS - Recreation
Dan Gilfillan, USFS
Brett Lyndaker, USFS – Wildlife Biologist
John Ailport, Inland Forest Management/Boundary County Fire Safe
Jonathan Luhnnow, Idaho Department of Lands
Jen Anderson, USFS – Project Leader
Joe Heisel, USFS – Roads Manager
Brandon Diller, KTOI
Matt Philbrook, BBKA
Paul Sieracki, Landowner
Rhonda Vogl, KVRI Facilitator & Kootenai Tribe of Idaho (KTOI)
Karen Schumacher, KVRI Recording Secretary & Kootenai Tribe of Idaho (KTOI)

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Opening:

Rhonda Vogl opened the meeting at 1:15 and welcomed everyone. She informed the group that the meeting would be covering the Westside Restoration Project Scoping Comments. Introductions followed.

Jen Anderson of the Forest Service outlined the process they have gone through beginning with the letter to the general public sent out in December of 2019. The letter invited comments pertaining to the Westside Restoration Project through the end of January, 2020 and allowed for letters received even after that date to ensure that concerns, questions and requests were reviewed.

Thirteen comment letters were reviewed. It was noted that some letters were received asking specifically about Effects Analysis, which has not been done yet. Those letters are not included. Letters being reviewed are from:

- Private Individuals
- Environmental Groups (2 from one source)
- Boundary Back Country Access
- The City, County and Kootenai Tribe of Idaho

The goal in reviewing the comments is to assist in developing the proposed actions and plan.

Sandy Steinhagen, private landowner emailed with questions specific to when the project would begin and what would happen. Specifically concerned about burning and traffic. Her questions were addressed to her satisfaction

Matt Philbrook, private landowner requested

- application of trail construction to include supporting Americans with Disabilities
- trail grooming to be done on both Myrtle Creek and Snow Creek

A: The project will not propose to authorize on areas that are not already authorized.

- Snow Creek is authorized for grooming and will be groomed
- Myrtle Creek is not authorized and grooming will not be done

Kevin Knauth addressed the separation between travel planning and ADA compliance; the needs of the forest versus that of ADA. These are two separate things that do not fall under the development of the plan of proposed actions.

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Boundary Backcountry Alliance sent in a letter of support specific to the recreation opportunities, parking on Snow Creek road and asked if select roads slated for storage, that were not needed could be left open for ATV use.

A: Being considered are roads 2190 and 2646A but internally it was felt these are not good options but they are still reviewing options and the idea is not ruled out.

American Forest Resource Council (AFRC) Offered a Letter of Support and asked

- We would like the Forest Service to shift their methods for protecting resources from that of firm prescriptive restrictions to one that focuses on descriptive end-results; in other words, describe what you would like the end result to be rather than prescribing how to get there.
 - A: This type of language is being used in “designation by prescription” in thinning contracts.
- We would like to see flexibility in the EA and contract to allow a variety of equipment to the sale areas Tethered-assist equipment is also becoming a more viable and available option for felling and yarding on steep slopes. This equipment has shown to contribute little additional ground disturbance when compared to traditional cable systems. Please prepare your NEPA analysis documents in a manner that will facilitate this type of equipment
 - A: Will look into this technology and effects to soils; have had internal conversations about this.
- We would like the District to carefully consider the following three factors when making a decision to decommission any road in the project area:
 - Determination of any potential resource risk related to a road segment
 - Determination of the access value provided by a road segment
 - Determination of whether the resource risk outweighs the access value (for timber management and other resource needs).
 - A: The Transportation Analysis Process (TAPS) and input from the IDT use this logic process already as standard procedure. Roads are analyzed for their current and future effects by the IDT.

Also mentioned in the letter were hardwood treatment options, and WUI. In the transportation analysis all resources are considered.

With respect to the request for riparian analysis – this will not fall within the scope of this project and will not be treated.

City of Bonners Ferry Voiced the concerns focused on applications for the project in and around Myrtle Creek watershed as it applies to quality and continued use for city water. City is requesting notification in writing prior to applications in order to prepare for any public service announcements needed.

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A: This will be possible. Proposed treatment is precommercial thinning (hand or mechanical) and burning is limited to the ridge and is not anticipated to impact water quality.

Idaho Conservation League

Letter states they do not support the project

Concerned about Impacts on wildlife from recreating. Feels it is inappropriate to include over snow prior to completing the travel plan. Specifically concerned about:

- Parking on Snow Creek
- Warming Hut on Roman Nose
- Non-Motorized Trail on Kootenai Point

Forest Service has reviewed these concerns and stated that the areas already are supporting large numbers of snowmobile and vehicles using both road and off road as parking areas and have been for many years. It is thought that a structured, environmentally safe parking lot could alleviate parking in unsafe areas and reduce damage.

ICL voiced concern that the approval is premature and that the travel plan needs to be approved first. (travel plan requires the National Forests to designate roads, trails and areas that are open for motorized use. It offers alternatives for a system of designated roads, trails and areas by class of vehicle and season of use.) ICL requests that the Forest Service consider the whole landscape versus just the North Zone.

A: Kevin Knauth of the FS stated that one does not prohibit the other. They plan to move ahead with snowmobile analysis. It was stated that the non-motorized trail would increase recreation from the valley to the mountains and that they plan to continue to move forward with analysis of this as there is no reason not to. Asked about specific concerns for the trail piece and stated that analysis for that will move forward as well.

Rhonda Vogl reminded the group that analysis does not equate to implementation. Analysis allows for funding to be captured.

Kevin agreed and added that certainly, analysis does not place a timing on how, when or if something is implemented. It does allow for capturing of funding. Over snow planning does not bring in funding.

Over use/overcrowding of trail concern voiced by Brad. Numbers of travelers are not available because trail monitoring is not done.

- A: most of the trail is not in the BMU. In consideration of Kootenai Point to Cooks Peak, about 3 plus miles of trail is within BMU and this can be made up elsewhere in the BMU.

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An Environmental Impact Statement is requested by ICL due to the concerns of environmental impact.

A: Preliminary analysis shows no significant impact. If warranted, proposed actions would be modified.

ICL asks about increasing the amount of road storage and suggests the road portion at the end of Ball Creek that is currently proposed be converted to a trail. This is desirable as trails longer than 3 miles are in demand/short supply.

A: Forest Service can do ½ mile but not much more before it would impact Irish Creek Road. FS is fine with moving trail further into general forest land.

ICL questioned the illegal use of four-wheeler use and asked about enforcement.

A: Because of the large degree of openness on Forest Service land, it cannot be done effectively. The only feasible way would be for barriers to be erected on the company land of Stimson and IDL.

ICL voiced concern about the impact of constructing temporary roads.

A: Forest Service understands and wants to limit/minimize the impact on streams when constructing temporary roads for this project.

ICL requested that any verified multi-story mature lynx habitat should be protected from timber harvest.

A: A habitat analysis was done and there is allowance for treatment within the WUI. A request was made for the findings of that evaluation to be disclosed. Habitat evaluation will be made available.

Question was asked about the Wildlife Urban Interface boundary.

A: Dan Dinning stated that in September, 2018 the county proposed a change to the boundary and it was finalized 2 weeks ago. The Westside project falls within the WUI boundary. It was affirmed that the draft EA will identify that boundary.

Timeline for the project was reviewed. In a couple of weeks, the scoping comments will be finalized and the Forest Service will roll into the Effects Analysis. That is another opportunity for input. It was reminded that we are still early in the process and still deciding how to analyze risk management. They are open to more discussions and are still building and learning. However, the staff is on a timeline. Project schedules for this and other projects rely on funding that requires certain things be accomplished within the stated guidelines.

Paul Sieracki, private landowner Dismayed at this project because it has been developed through collaboration. The collaborators do not represent the diversity of opinions that the public has.

A: Collaboration is a requirement of CFLRP – and anyone who wishes to collaborate is welcome and public is notified of meetings.

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Landowner states: logging and roadbuilding do not constitute restoration, please rename and reconsider the objectives for this project. This project violates the ESA, NFMA and NEPA.

A: Project will meet ESA, NFMA and NEPA.

Landowner requests: please develop a max carbon sequestration alternative for the project areas.

A: Effects will be analyzed for in the EA

Landowner requests: change the termination date for snowmobile use in grizzly habitat from April 1 to March 15 to account for earlier den exiting

A: Modifying the date would need to be done through Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) based on research support

Landowner also voiced concern about the effects on Subalpine Larch, Whitebark Pine (USFS sensitive and USFWS candidate), Subalpine Fir and Engelman Spruce in the Roman Nose area.

A: Effects will be analyzed for in the EA; veg and botany reports. Consultation with FWS.

Landowner requests: Do not enter old growth and recruitment old growth stands in the project area as identified in the old forest plan.

A: Current FP – veg management cannot modify old growth such that it no longer meets the definition now or in the future. Veg and fuels treatments will be consistent with the FP direction on OG. Effects will be analyzed for in the EA.

Letter also requested a trail reroute far away from snow chute. This will be analyzed. It was restated that decisions related to resource damage as a result of over snow vehicle use will not be considered as a part of this project but will be looked at in the context of other discussions. Authorized groomed routes (Snow Creek) are the only items for this forum.

The group was reminded that the Environmental Analysis portion of this project allows for further public comment and response.

Alliance for Wild Rockies submitted some questions that were specific to another project. Those questions have been disregarded.

Requested Please include an alternative which would implement prescribed fire fuels treatments that do not include removal of commercial wood products.

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A: Line officer decision “Burn only” alternative likely presents too great of risk to municipal watershed. And limited scope due to risk would likely not meet purpose and need - reducing crown fuels or veg objectives such modifying structure and composition.

Requested: Include an alternative that excludes burning and logging in the presence of whitebark pine regeneration. Proposed need not met for White Bark Pine.

A: FS will include in the design process for protection.

EIS requested for the project

Questioned need to include activities that will contain and limit the spread of ...invasive plants.” The EIS must explain why this “need” exists, in the context of the FS’s ongoing implementation of its Bonners Ferry Noxious Weed EIS.

A: We will be analyzing in detail the use of 3 chemicals for Ventenata grass which are not included in the Bonners Ferry Weeds EIS.

Stated since we are awaiting the results of updated ESA consultation on the Forest Plan, the Westside proposal is premature and subverts NEPA and the ESA.

A: Project timing sync. We expect consultation to be complete prior to a decision on this project.

Further requests and questions submitted are addressed and noted as addressed by reports already completed and filed.

KVRI submitted a Letter of Support

Kootenai Tribe of Idaho submitted a letter of support requesting

- analysis of vegetative management; silvicultural prescriptions, fire history, and forest vegetation key indicators are critical
- The 15 openings larger than 40 acres will need to be further analyzed and justified
- analyze compatibility of recreation associated with Forest Plan requirements (e.g. need to provide access, protect areas with cultural or archaeological resources and provide for wildlife and fisheries)
- Analysis will need to assess environmental impact on grizzlies, management indicator species (MIS), sensitive species and maintain consistency with recent legal decisions
- Travel Planning - analysis will need to review motorized and non-motorized uses, winter travel, and site-specific travel management for access and roads, while understanding interactions and timing issues

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A: Fuels, vegetation analysis. Justification will be provided on >40 ac openings and requires Regional Forester approval. Resource analysis will include all proposals.

Olivia Drake, Private landowner Asked that the FS consider the economic advantages of recreation in our area.

Asked if the non-motorized trail provides equestrian and/or mountain bike use.

A: Trails located on refuge (even in part) do not allow for either bikes or horses

Boundary County wrote a letter of support.

Requested: clarity regarding processes with the Recreational part regarding analyzation for winter uses and how these will be implemented.

Asked: how many miles of the new proposed trail are in the Grizzly BMU and are there potential impacts to future open road densities.

A: Will be analyzed. But initial assessment from wildlife is this will not impact future open road densities. Line Officer has stated if that were the case, the first choice would be to close the new trail, not the open roads. ~3.5 miles in BMU.

General Question asked why are new trails being proposed when it is difficult to afford the maintenance on existing ones?

A: Many of the funding opportunities are tied to creation of new trails. That funding allows us to stretch operations that we couldn't otherwise. They are considering the opportunities that may exist for partnerships with others in maintaining trails.

All are encouraged to look at the letters submitted for this project on the website.

A travel analysis meeting was requested. It was explained that in many projects there is room for decisions to be made but in this case, there is not the flexibility for that approach.

Appreciation was expressed for the effort that the Forest Service put forth in organizing and responding to the scoping letters.

Meeting called at 3:05