

Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative  
January 9, 2017 – 7:00 p.m.  
Board Meeting – University of Idaho Extension Office

**Board Members in Attendance:**

Adam Arthur, (Alt.) City of Bonners Ferry & KVRI Co-chair  
Dan Dinning, Boundary County Commissioner & KVRI Co-chair  
Gary Aitken, Jr., Kootenai Tribe of Idaho Chair (KTOI) & KVRI Co-chair  
Sandy Ashworth, Social/Cultural/Historical Interests  
Bob Blanford, Business/Industry  
Ed Atkins Jr., Corporate Agriculture/Landowner  
Kevin Knauth, (Alt.) Bonners Ferry Ranger District, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)  
Kennon McClintock -Conservationist/Environmentalist (alt.)  
Jim Cadnum, Landowner (Industrial)  
Patty Perry, KVRI Facilitator & KTOI  
Sherrie Cossairt, KVRI Recording Secretary & KTOI

**Agency/Others in Attendance:**

Tim Dougherty, IFG  
Doug Nishek, USFS  
Ed Koberstein, USFS  
Greg Hoffman, USACE  
Dac Collins, Bonners Ferry Herald

**Opening:**

Co-Chair, Gary Aitken Jr., opened and welcomed everyone to the meeting; introductions followed.

The November 21, 2016, KVRI meeting draft notes were approved by consensus.

Happy 16<sup>th</sup> Birthday to KVRI! Birthday cake was served and pictures taken.

**Forestry Committee-Boulder Creek Restoration Project (BCRP): Doug Nishek**

The Boulder Creek Restoration Project (BCRP) area encompasses 40,612 acres which includes Boulder Creek and all of its tributaries. It drains into the Kootenai River by the Idaho/Montana state border. The Forest Service has been tasked to look at the entire watershed holistically, what is and what is not working in that ecosystem.

The primary focus of the BCRP is to manage the forest stands in the project area to maintain or improve their resilience to disturbances such as drought, insect and disease outbreaks, and wildfires.

There are many components in the watershed: forest stands, forest fuel accumulations, steep and inaccessible topography, adjacency to the wildland-urban interface (WUI), road systems, community water systems, and communication towers. Recreation areas popular with the community are Boulder Creek Meadows, the Boulder City Ghost Town, and the Boulder Creek Loop Road #408.

Another main focus for proposing the project is to achieve access management standards for the Boulder BMU (Bear Management Unit) located in the project area. This project will serve as the

mechanism to achieve access management standards for the BMU by increasing grizzly bear core habitat and reducing the Total Motorized Route Density (TMRD) for this BMU by the 2019 deadline.

Patty explained that the access amendment portion of the project is meeting the habitat needs of the bear by creating more core but also meeting the needs of the community by looking at roads they like to have open and usable.

The project overlaps the following different management areas: Backcountry Restoration (Roadless), General Forest, Eligible Wild and Scenic River area, private lands and the Hunt Girl Research Natural Area.

Natural fires have been absent for over 100 years in this area, resulting in a landscape with increased fuels and dense stands of similar age, structure and composition. The proposal prescribes several different methods to manage the vegetation in the Boulder Project area. Some of the needs are to reduce fuels and return fire to a fire-dependent landscape, create openings, restore white pine and larch and restore dry site old growth stand structure. Stand treatments include pre-commercial thinning, seed tree cuts, shelter wood cuts, and group selection harvesting.

Other resource objectives include: maintaining and improving recreational sites, maintaining aquatic ecosystems (improving fish passage in the middle fork of Boulder Creek), treating noxious weeds, promoting the stability of wildlife habitat, roads and recreation potential (mountain bike trails, Boulder City Ghost Town, and improve trailheads).

The popularity of the book "The Boys in the Boat" which has a Boulder City connection has drawn attention to the area even more. This project will improve trailhead parking areas as well as add interpretive signs and maps to the area. According to Kevin this part of the project meets the CFLRP educational component goal.

The project proposal for the road systems include placing some roads into storage for future use and to decommission one road, converting Road 1304 G to a non-motorized biking trail, reopening Road 2209 to Kootenai River Walk Trailhead and 3.5 miles of temporary road construction.

Patty and Doug agreed that there will be a meeting in the future for the public to have the opportunity to ask questions to help everyone understand the roads in conjunction with the Grizzly Bear Access amendments and what we are trying to accomplish in the project.

Fuel reduction activities include burn units designed to improve the historical integrity of the area because they would create openings, rejuvenate aspen clones, improve wildlife habitat, reduce fuels, and allow for safe and effective fire management into the future.

The other project in the area is the Starry Goat Project in the Three Rivers Ranger District. It is currently proposing a vegetation management project similar to the BCRP. The Bonners Ferry Ranger District is coordinating with them weekly.

Patty stated that what KVRI would like to be able to do, based on the Forestry committee's work with the Forest Service on this project, is to provide a letter of support in response to scoping that says KVRI would like to see the project move forward and we hope to continue to help develop it as the analysis comes together and we know what the changes to the project might be along with the comments.

Patty read a letter of support for the Boulder Creek Restoration Project from KVRI to the Forest Service.

Discussion followed.

Tim Dougherty voiced his concern about the helicopter units included in the project. He stated that IFG will be looking at the sale or the proposal on the stewardship. He remembers a stewardship project the agency wasn't able to sell, because of the need for a helicopter to come in to log. The agency had a ½ million dollars allocated to pay for it; the project was advertised and didn't receive solicitations, 3 times. Tim added that he doesn't know if KVRI, as a Board, wants to address it now or later? But he will be writing comments that he wants the helicopter areas out and burn instead. It's not an economic issue; it's trying to find the helicopter companies to do the job. The companies are not logging smaller to moderate diameter timber. There is one company left in the area and during fire season in the summer they are gone. He is concerned about the agency putting all their effort into 1800 acres of timber harvest that might potentially stop the project in its tracks. He understands the ideas to mix enough of the good with some of the bad. But he says that is not reality. He wants to back the project for IFG but he doesn't want the 1800 acres of helicopter units included.

Dan Dinning stated that the Commissioner's comment letter today supports the analysis including the helicopter units with the understanding the analysis will be good for a period of ten years. We recognize it may or may not come up in this sale but the analysis will be there in case things change in the future.

Tim agreed that that was a good thought process.

Kevin K. added that from an analysis perspective, it is not a big push in the work load to analyze those units.

Patty stated that the understanding is; we are going to analyze the area and if the opportunity were there for helicopter logging this area could be available, but we recognize that this opportunity may never be financially feasible and we are not connecting it to anything else in the project. Dan confirmed that their intent was to analyze it. Doug added that the idea is if it's clear from a NEPA standpoint we know what the effects are and if the market comes back we can take advantage of it.

Patty asked the question: If you analyze it now for helicopter units, can you use other mechanisms to treat those units later, such as burning? Doug verified that you can.

Tim concluded that it was a wise move and liked how Dan worded it in the Commissioner's Comments.

Kevin added that we are not going to find the opportunity to go back in and re-analyze it later. All agreed.

Patty asked for confirmation to analyze the project as proposed. The Board agreed to send the comment letter as it was read.

*Doug's full presentation is available at [kootenai.org](http://kootenai.org)*

### **Forest Service 5 year plan Review - Ed Koberstein**

The Bonners Ferry Ranger District has been actively managed for a very long time. They continue to try to identify large areas from a NEPA efficiency standpoint and identify multiple resource opportunities within those NEPA project areas.

They took the same strategy used to identify the Boulder purpose and need and looked at the rest of the District based on past activities; adjacency to WUI, critical infrastructure, opportunities for integrated habitat restoration, and aquatic restoration.

**Deer Creek:** Ready to sign a decision in late spring 2017 for the Deer Creek Restoration Project.

**Camp Dawson:** There is a lot of accessible ground, with a WUI interface, community watershed, bits and pieces leftover from past treatment activity, and still a lot of area left to manage in this landscape. This area meets all the criteria to utilize a HFRA CE (Healthy Forest Restoration Act – Categorical Exclusion); already evaluating opportunities this winter; proposed action ready to go in late fall 2017.

Patty explained that HFRA (Healthy Forest Restoration Act) is a program that allows us to move ahead with collaboration to get this project pulled together and the CE (Categorical Exclusion) is a streamlined process for doing NEPA. This allows us to move ahead quicker than larger analysis documents such as an Environmental Assessment (EA) or EIS (Environmental Impact Study). We can use this authority because this area has had prior treatment activity and it is less than 3000 treatment acres.

The Idaho Panhandle has developed a NEPA strike team in partnership with the Nez Perce /Clearwater National forest. What that NEPA strike team is focused on currently are HFRA/CE opportunities. The team will arrive on the Panhandle Forest in late September and because of our CFLRP initiative in Boundary County, we are able to position ourselves very well to utilize the strike team for NEPA.

While using the team for Camp Dawson, at the same time because of proximity and logistics, we identified an area adjacent to Robinson Lake area (Robin Hood). The same scenario is priority of need, treatments of fuels standpoint, dry site restoration, meets HFRA and it is a good opportunity to utilize that same team to work on both projects at same time. That puts us on a timeline for 4<sup>th</sup> qtr. FY2018 for a decision memo on these two projects. If CFLRP were to expire, it allows us to realize implementation in the calendar year 2019, so we can take full credit for attainment of accomplishments (awarding of sales) on these two projects.

**Robin Hood:**

Survey work would be completed this summer; NEPA completed over the winter of 2017-18.

The advantages of using a NEPA strike team is that the local personnel will develop the project; they do all the preloading survey work; analysis is done locally; then the team goes through the NEPA compliance steps, prepares the document and decision memo. After the decision memo is signed, it goes back to the local unit to administer and implement.

Patty stated that when we talk about vegetation management we are talking about logging that provides for the timber for local mills here, each of those projects will have a harvest management component.

Ed explained that HFRA/CE authority projects are fuel and vegetation driven, not integrated and comprehensive like Boulder with all the other restoration components with it requiring an EA or EIS. These areas are very specific in purpose and need; limited in scope and scale for HFRA/CE; to clean up more of the fuels and vegetation that we've missed.

**Trout Ball Watershed:** A lot of integrated treatments, White Bark Pine restoration; WUI Westside road, larger more comprehensive NEPA project; started some initial survey work; no activities anticipated to

begin here until 2019 with a decision later 2020/21. This area includes road restoration opportunities, fuels, wildlife, and recreation.

We are waiting to enter this West side area because of the current activity in the Bluegrass BMU (Bear Management Unit). There is a need to have the Selkirk ecosystem in compliance first.

**Caribou/Snow Creek drainage:** This drainage was part of the Sundance fire event in 1967. These timber stands are starting to become available now for commercial thinning opportunities and reallocation of growing space to maintain healthy forest conditions and the seral species component. There is a Larch component on this landscape and because of overstocking and overcrowding; there is a definite need to take care of it now before the stands start to collapse. There are road access needs; Decision FY2022, with a life expectancy of that NEPA being 10 years; those trees will be a perfect age and size class for thinning opportunities. It is also adjacent to private lands, with a risk of fire activity much like Parker Ridge.

They did look at other areas, including the face of Clifty above town; access is extremely limited, no opportunities currently here other than helicopter, wouldn't be viable to propose a project that was 100 percent helicopter. The economic feasibility wasn't there. Fire is not an option in this space.

Discussion followed.

They are still developing opportunities on the Westside area, could be included in Trout Ball or Caribou, or individual treatments.

Tim Dougherty asked about the Snow/Caribou area, how is that different than say PCT when it comes to Lynx analysis above 4000 feet? When the stands have started to self-prune we have exclusion, up to 20 feet self-pruning, habitat effectiveness isn't there any more for Lynx. They need small hiding cover, branches to the ground or snow depth that intercepts the branches to the ground. We don't get that much snow.

### **Libby Dam Operations Review presentation, Greg Hoffman, USACE**

Greg began his presentation with the most recent snow pack information from NRCS for the Montana portion of the Kootenai River and the Northern Panhandle. The graph showed the snow/water equivalent and even though there was a lot of snow the equivalent is still below average, due in part to the dry, cold snow; not much base to it.

The precipitation totals from October 1, the beginning of the water year, shows that we've set records for precipitation in October resulting in a total of 130% of normal precipitation.

The average water inflow is 6+ million acre feet for the period of April-August each year. The inflow forecasting started high and carried through into the January forecast, in addition to the precipitation and the snow we did receive. The inflow is above average at 121 % in December and 117% in January. The target elevation for the end of January is 2396 ft., it was at 2405 ft. and the water has already been moved to reach the target elevation.

Probability Chart showed the increase of the amount rain we have observed since October 1<sup>st</sup> which is above normal. It also showed the projections of what inflow will likely be based on the 67 ensemble streamflow prediction traces.

The Lake Koocanusa Elevation chart shows that if there is high precipitation in February/March, reservoir will continue to be drafted to provide flood storage for the spring runoff. Modeling based on updated forecasting occurs frequently; Greg will continue to provide info.

The outflow from Libby Dam should be down to minimum flow in March, although these predictions could be a little low.

The projection of the river stages at Bonners Ferry shows peaking at 1760 ft., well below flood stage of 1764 ft.

Greg presented the Reservoir's inflow, outflow and elevations patterns from 2006 to 2016 all on one graph. According to the pattern it looks like 2017 may be a better than average water year. Also according to the documented inflow measurements over those years, they have never seen that much water coming into the system in October. Although there may have been similar amounts of precipitation over the years, the forms of precipitation and the times of year are changing according to the patterns shown in the graph.

The Corps had just completed a System Operation Request for low flow for September and October for the KTOI habitat work done in the river. One of the unanticipated effects of this operation was that the reservoir gained elevation during October due to the above normal rainfall. Correspondingly, the Corps had to increase outflow in November and December to reach the end-of-year baseline flood risk management elevation of 2411 ft. What that did to temperature management was that there was so much water going in and none going out during the fall that the forebay was mixing and warming (i.e. warmer water coming in and warmer/increasing surface waters being mixed with cooler sub-surface waters). During late December, as flows continued to be high, reservoir elevations continued to drop, and air temperatures plunged, river temperatures were reduced to normal levels. The reservoir reached "isothermy" – the entire forebay of the reservoir is roughly 38-39 degrees. Greg stated that he had never seen it where there was so much thermal mixing in the forebay to actually warm up the water in the deepest elevations.

Greg concluded his presentation stating that it is a fact that Burbot like colder water and lower flows; this year it could be both and should be interesting.

*The graphs for Greg's presentation are available on [kootenai.org](http://kootenai.org).*

### **Kevin Knauth-Plaque presentation to Patty**

Kevin Knauth surprised Patty with a plaque that read "In recognition and appreciation for your many years of service and dedication to the Idaho Panhandle Resource Advisory Committee (RAC)".

### **Correspondence:**

Patty shared that the Kootenai Tribe received a letter announcing that Senator Risch had introduced the Scotchman's Peak Wilderness Act to a Senate Committee.

Kevin Knauth will present the executive summary of the CLFRP Annual Report at the next meeting.

### **Next KVRI Meeting:**

The next KVRI meeting will be on February 13, 2017 at 7 p.m.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:40 p.m.  
Sherrie Cossairt  
KTOI/KVRI Admin. Assistant