

Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative
March 20, 2017 – 7:00 p.m.
Board Meeting – University of Idaho Extension Office

Board Members in Attendance:

David Sims, City of Bonners Ferry & KVRI Co-chair
Dan Dinning, Boundary County Commissioner & KVRI Co-chair
Gary Aitken, Jr., Kootenai Tribe of Idaho (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)
Jim Cadnum, Landowner (Industrial)
Dave Wattenbarger, Soil Conservation District/Ag Landowner
Patty Perry, KVRI Facilitator & KTOI
Sherrie Cossairt, KVRI Recording Secretary & KTOI

Agency/Others in Attendance:

Dave Gray, Social/Cultural/Historical Interests (alt.)
Karen Cathey, USFWS, NIFO
Dianna Ellis, Kootenai National Wildlife Refuge
Norm Merz, KTOI
Sid Smith, Senator Jim Risch's office
Stephen Howlett
Jonathan Luhnnow, Idaho Dept. of Lands
Joel Fenolio, USACE
Michael Listman, KBC19
Rita Pensmith, KBCI 9B TV
Ree Brannon, NRCS, Boundary County
Katherine Rowden, National Weather Service
Scott Lawrence, USACE
Russ Hegedes, IFG
Mike Meier, Emergency Management Boundary County
Wayne Wilkerson, USFWS, NWR
Janna Paronto, BLM
Greg Hoffman, USACE

Opening:

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

The February 13, 2017, KVRI meeting draft notes were approved by consensus.

Presentation: Kootenai Basin Operations for 2017 - Joel Fenolio, USACE

Joel Fenolio with the USACE (United States Army Corps of Engineers) gave a presentation/update on the Kootenai Basin Operations for 2017.

Precipitation:

According to the Precipitation Totals map, as of March 1, 2017, the Kootenai Basin has already seen above average precipitation. October was a record month for precipitation, receiving 200 to 400 percent of average precipitation; the moisture basically set in the ground because of the snowfall as well as rain and freezing temperatures afterwards. November, December and January were below average precipitation totals in the Basin. Then February followed as another record month for precipitation and March has also been above average so far.

Temperatures:

Temperatures for October and November were average; December, January, and February cooled off. All the water that fell in October and February has stayed in the ground and we've had a lot of low level elevation snowpack too.

Snowpack:

What this did for snowpack totals is that we were below average for Feb 1 but by March 1st we were up to average. Now we are sitting at 120 % of average above Libby, although it is still not the 2011 totals. All high elevations SNOTEL sights are above average right now and although the low elevations are causing problems they are not translating to the higher elevations snowpacks.

Snow Density:

High elevation snowpacks in this area are not quite ready to run off because of the cold temperatures we have seen. We might actually see a somewhat normal hydrograph in terms of the timing compared to the last 2 years.

Soil Moisture:

Right now we are looking at 99% soil moisture in the Basin; heavy rains, warmer temperatures and low elevation snowpack, run off quickly throughout the entire basin. Flash floods are the concern this year.

Storage:

Joel explained that Libby, Albeni Falls, and Grand Coulee are part of storage reservoir system. They are used to store water in the spring to control flooding in Portland; main control point is Vancouver gauge; control is at 16 ft.; Grand Coulee is drawn down to accommodate drum gate maintenance and won't refill until mid-May.

Right now we are in a System emergency for the Columbia system early because of the low elevation snowpack that has come off because of all the precipitation we've had. Albeni Falls is being used as a

surrogate for Grand Coulee during this event. It's the first time it has been used for a storage event for flooding in the winter since 1996.

Locally:

What we have already seen this year is the St Joe River at Cataldo has reached flood stage and the Fisher River has also reached flood stage once this year; this appears to be the rush of the low elevation snowpack coming off.

We have already pushed 40,000 cfs. through Bonners Ferry; mainly coming from the Moyie, Fisher and Yaak Rivers; all the low elevation snowpack is working its way out of the system right now.

Climate Outlook:

The climate outlook shows that we have actually seen a natural winter for the first time in about 3 years. Outlooks are for above average precipitation in the Columbia Basin in April, May, and June this year. The outlooks are not forecasts but potentially what's going to happen this spring.

Discussion followed.

Current Operations:

- March 1st WSF for Libby Dam 115% of average.
- Libby Dam currently at 2395.7 ft. elevation; operates between 2287 ft. and 2459 ft.
- End of month target is 2382.1 by March 31 (Probably won't meet the target; the Corps has been holding back water for the bank stability construction project at Blackwell Flats Campground downstream of the dam)
- Will most likely hit the target by April 5th
- Plan to push releases up to powerhouse by Tuesday (Powerhouse releases 25,000 cfs.)

In summary:

- Heavily saturated soils throughout the Columbia River system
- High elevation snowpack is above average, at this time early runoff not likely
- Above average precipitation
- Flood risk is moderate; soil saturation has increase flood risk throughout the region; above average precipitation anticipated for the spring

Discussion followed

Ed Atkins asked about the soil moisture issues for agriculture ground, could it be worse than 2012 for farmers this year? Ed asked Joel for a hydrograph for District 5, to give an idea how much seepage they might have. Joel said he would have it created and sent to him.

Joel's complete slide presentation is available online at Kootenai.org

Committee Updates:

Patty explained that we were going to have the District Forest Service staff give us an overview of roads in the Boulder Creek Restoration Project that they gave at the Forestry Meeting in February but that update will be in April. Kevin will give a general overview of where we are at on our projects.

Also a reminder this Thursday, March 23 at 1:30 p.m., the Co-Chairs and members of the Board will be meeting with Mary Farnsworth, Forest Supervisor. They will discuss in depth the CFLR Project and the CFLR annual report that Kevin presented at the February KVRI meeting. The meeting will be held at the Kootenai Tribal Office; anyone is welcome to attend.

Forestry Committee: Kevin Knauth

Kevin stated that next month will be a better opportunity to update everyone on the Boulder Creek Project and Roads in that project. They will have come to the end of the objection period and the specialist teams will have completed their reports.

Deer Creek Project: Currently in the objection period which ends April 17th (next KVRI meeting); have one objection for the project that will be addressed; plan to have a decision this year, offer the first of two timber sales this summer; the second one will be next year.

Boulder Creek Project: Plan to have a decision in a year from now, 1st sale coming out in 1st quarter, Dec 2018 sale.

Other projects: Two (2) Categorical Exclusions (CE) projects (Camp Dawson and Robin Hood) will be utilizing the NEPA Strike team that is hosted out of the Supervisor's Office in Coeur d'Alene. Once the team begins the work on the NEPA analysis they will be done in a year with the decision; between the two projects they are looking to treat 5000 acres.

Forest Service CFLRP Site Visit in July: The Washington Office of the Forest Service is going to do a site visit of the KVRI project area in July. It will include folks from the Washington, DC office as well as folks from the Regional Office in Missoula. They want to see how our CFLRP project has been implemented, compared with what we proposed initially and how well we've done---so they want to get out on the ground and see some of that. District staff was just introduced to the general agenda this morning. No agenda to review yet, it is to see our project area as well as two others. The Forest Service will need a KVRI attendee list.

TMDL Committee Update: Patty Perry

There is a TMDL Committee meeting this Friday, March 24, at 8:30 a.m. at the Kootenai Tribal Office. Hawk Stone will be giving his presentation to the Committee regarding the Forest Practices audit and DEQ will have their updates. The Committee will also meet again in April.

Old Business: Patty Perry

Meeting with Forest Supervisor: The meeting with Forest Supervisor, Mary Farnsworth, and the KVRI Co-chairs and Board members will be on March 23rd, 1:30 p.m. at the Kootenai Tribal Office.

Letter of Support for the County:

In 2015, KVRI wrote a Letter of Support for the County's Riverside and Westside Road projects for a grant that they were applying for through the Federal Land Access Program. They were originally awarded that grant. The County Road & Bridge Department has requested another letter of support from the KVRI Board. All agreed to sending the letter of support.

Letter of Support for the City:

David Sims asked for the same support for the City of Bonners Ferry. The Board agreed and Patty will draft that letter as well and have the Board sign.

New Business: Patty Perry

Patty reviewed the documents she has emailed or forwarded to the Board:

- Deer Creek Draft Decision Notice letter
- Barry Wynsma's Objection letter (Deer Creek Project)
- Brad Smith Response letter (Deer Creek Project)
- A copy of the letter approved at the last meeting on the Forest Plan MA 5 and MA 6 designations

Idaho Forest Group Contractors Meeting

Patty will attend the Idaho Forest Group Annual Contractor meeting on March 30 in Coeur d'Alene, to discuss collaboration.

Other Committee Updates:

Caribou Census: Norm Merz

Norm reported that the Caribou Census flight took place on Sunday and Monday. They found 1 group of 11 Caribou (found 12 last year); found a missing radio collar, ¼ mile from the last satellite location signal. The census is not complete as we are waiting for another day of clear skies to finish the US side of the Recovery Area.

Norm received data from Idaho Fish & Game, from the underpass cameras installed in July near Copeland. The data included 16,000 photos taken from the three underpasses. According to the data, the middle underpass is getting the most use, mainly deer and elk, and the underpass furthest north is getting used the least. Looking at the average number of days the cameras are out and number of animals recorded it shows about 16 animals per day are using the underpasses.

Norm explained that underpass use increases over the years as animals and more generations get used to using them. It will be interesting to compare to the initial data they have. They have been in place for almost 15 years.

Office of Senator Jim Risch: Sid Smith

Sid reported that this week the Senate will be holding a hearing on the confirmation of Gov. Perdue for position of Secretary of Agriculture.

The Continuing Resolution (CR) is due to expire at the end of April. Two rules of thought: Pass another CR to extend funding for government at current levels for the rest of the fiscal year, or pass appropriation bills to fund the government for the rest of fiscal year 2017. At this point, congress will most likely pass another CR to finish out the rest of the year.

Commissioner Dinning asked about the status of SRS (Secure Rural Schools aka Craig/Wyden) funding. Sid responded that it is still uncertain at this time, although the delegation continues to look for a vehicle to move it and get it reauthorized.

The next KVRI meeting will be on April 17, 2017 at 7 p.m.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Sherrie Cossairt

KTOI/KVRI Admin. Assistant