

Meeting Notes
Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative
May 18, 2015 – 6:30 p.m.
Board Meeting – University of Idaho Extension Office

Board Members in Attendance:

Dan Dinning, Boundary County Commissioner & KVRI Co-chair
Gary Aitken Jr., Kootenai Tribe of Idaho (KTOI) & KVRI Co- chair
David Anderson, Mayor, City of Bonners Ferry & KVRI Co-chair
Sandy Ashworth, Boundary County Library, Social/Cultural/Historical Interests
Kevin Knauth, (Alt.) Bonners Ferry Ranger District, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
Dave Wattenbarger, Boundary County Soil Conservation District
Bob Blanford, Business/Industry
Kennon McClintock, (Alt.) Conservation
Ed Atkins, Corporate Agriculture
Chip Corsi, (Alt.) Idaho Fish & Game
Jim Cadnum, Industrial Forest

Patty Perry, KVRI Facilitator & KTOI
Shandee Alexander, KVRI Recording Secretary & KTOI

Agency/Others in Attendance:

Ben Conard, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Norm Merz, KTOI
Sid Smith, Sen. Jim Risch
Russ Hegedus, Idaho Forest Group
Judy Morbeck, Congressman Raul Labrador
Karen Roetter, Sen. Mike Crapo
Dianna Ellis, Kootenai National Wildlife Refuge
Greg Hoffman, USACE- Libby Dam
Laura Roady, Bonners Ferry Herald

Opening:

Pizza and cookies were provided for the meeting. There was time for conversation.

Dan Dinning opened and welcomed everyone to the monthly meeting; introductions followed. Dan wanted to take a minute and thank everyone who makes the longer trips to be at the meeting.

Bob Blanford pointed out a correction that needed to be made to the April KVRI Draft notes. Under Stan Galloway's comment, it reads 238 mbf and 40 mbf. It should be changed to 238 mmbf and 40 mmbf. With the corrections, the group approved the April 20th draft meeting by consensus.

Committee Updates:

Forestry Committee:

Open House-

An open house to discuss the Deer Creek Project was held on May 13th 5 – 6:30 p.m. Steve Oxford attended for Tom Oxford, who owns property on top of Placer Creek. Tim Narvaes, representing Moyie Springs city council and Scot Web, an interested citizen in recreation and roads. All 3 had valuable input for the Deer Creek project.

Project meeting-

The Forest Service (FS) team and the committee discussed proposed actions and alternatives.

Kevin went over the Deer Creek Project status report provided by the FS of the proposed actions and alternatives:

1. Proposed Action- includes vegetation and road management, aquatic restoration and recreational site improvements. Estimated volume of 10 mmbf.
2. No road work or timber harvest in the Cabinet Yaak Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone- The same as #1 except no vegetation treatments or road work within the Bear Management Unit (BMU). Estimated volume of 5 mmbf.

Both 1 and 2 (with the BMU) include prescribed burning, regeneration harvest >40 acres when necessary.

3. Regeneration Openings <40 acres- has the same actions, however regeneration openings are < 40 acres. Estimated volume of 7 mmbf.
4. Placer Creek (2540 Road) Decommissioning- Still analyzing from a fishery, hydro, and soils prospective with the effect the road has currently on the Placer Creek drainage. In effort to give the Forest Supervisor, Mary Farnsworth, some way to compare whether to decommission the road or do regular road maintenance and fix failures as they occur. The ID Team felt that it would be best to give it its own alternative. The FS wants to be as transparent as possible, and want to give the people an adequate understanding of the project when it comes time to comment. This road segment would not affect the volume of timber harvest.

Kevin mentioned that he and Patty felt it needed a different name, Placer Creek Aquatics Restoration, or something along that line. The aquatic habitat is really what the analysis is looking at.

5. No Action

Patty brought up that the discussion on Placer Creek road is not to decommission the road. It's to study the aquatics and to understand what's happening to that drainage and decide what the best alternative is. Decommission may be an outcome or an action, but it isn't what is driving the analysis. Once there is analysis, then there can be an intelligent conversation that is not emotionally charged. Patty stated that until the analysis is done, continuing to fuel the fire with discussion, is not moving the collaboration forward in a positive manner.

Kevin added, if this project was put in the hands of 3 different team leads, it may have been handled 3 different ways. There's no right or wrong way. The point being: develop a purpose and need, develop alternatives that meet it, and then analyze the alternatives. This drives alternatives what best represents what is trying to be done. Aside from that, NEPA does not have strict "cookbook" rules.

Patty: Read the purpose and need for the project:

- To provide for trees species, stocking levels and forest pattern that is more resilient and resistant to disturbances such as insects, diseases, wildfire and drought.
- Maintain and promote forest conditions that reduce forest hazard in the planning area

- Expand the recreation opportunities in the planning area by maintaining, improving, and creating recreation facilities and infrastructure
- Other resource objectives:
 - Contain or control existing noxious weed populations
 - Maintain and improve aquatic systems by reducing sedimentation and improving in-stream habitat
 - Maximize opportunities to utilize forest products and provide economic opportunity through restoration.

Chip Corsi asked if Placer Creek Road could have been included, without a separate alternative, and still be assessed. He is concerned with too many roads and not being able to take care of them, and impacts on water resources, but understands that shining a spotlight on something and creating a wedge issue when you don't need to, is not a good thing.

Norm said basically if there is an issue that's brought out in scoping you have to demonstrate that you can get it down to a non-significant impact. If you can't, then you need to develop an alternative. He thinks where Patty is at, is, we haven't seen enough information to know whether we can reduce that impact to a non-significant level.

Kevin: that's one driver, to have an alternative. If you look at #2, there is no driver like that to drive #2. #1 has all the logging in that BMU. Some of the things that come out of this is, the desire for whether internal or external comments can drive alternatives. Issues or perceived issues can drive alternatives, or the need to create alternatives.

Patty asked what drove #2. The group had not seen it until the Forestry meeting. Patty was wondering if it was the Grizzly Bear recovery plan or if it was a specific comment from scoping.

Kevin answered that it was a comment. Brett said from a Wildlife Biologist's perspective, the easiest way to address that is to have an alternative that does not treat within the BMU. It provides the easiest route for comparison. There might have been comments for #3 but Kevin couldn't remember the specifics on it... it's easier to talk about the effects of regeneration >40 if there has been analysis done <40. It comes out of the regional office in terms of, if you're going to look at >40 that you provide an alternative that analyzes <40.

Sandy Ashworth: Under alternative #2, on the part that's not the BMU, the actions in #1 will go forward on that. Does that include the Placer Creek piece?

Kevin: Yes.

Sandy: Then I agree with Chip, can it be all together and not out on its own?

Kevin: When I was talking to AJ today about the need for having #4 as a separate alternative, AJ had talked about the ability to compare. AJ clarified that #1 did not look at decommissioning, but looks at what can be done to fix it. So #1 deals with not decommissioning and #4 deals with it through decommission.

Chip: If you did that with the proposed action, would that mean that the Placer Road with decommissioning would be off limits, even if an aquatic analysis says that's the best thing to do?

Kevin: No. The Decision Maker can say, "I will choose everything in #1, except I will decommission the Placer Creek Road." The Decision Maker can take pieces and put them together. The key is to make sure you have analyzed everything so the Decision Maker has the opportunity to make the decision they feel appropriate.

Sandy: So when you say, "Transportation system management," that doesn't (as an overarching descriptive) include keeping them up or maybe taking them out. You have to add the "taking them out" separately? It seems pretty comprehensive.

Kevin: You don't need to.

Sandy: If you say "Transportation system management," to me that means you make a decision one way or another or in between. Fix it, don't fix it, take it out, keep it up...

Kevin: This is what drove my 1st discussion today with our NEPA person. Do we have the ability to be transparent and give folks adequate opportunity to comment if we just included it in the proposed action; like we were treating any other road. The NEPA person was still thinking about it. A lot of this stuff is just to make sure you are clear on what you're planning and you give every opportunity for folks to comment on what you're planning. My concern was, would our draft EA be written in such a way that it would be clear what we were looking at in regard to that road. Or is it cleaner and clearer to people if we provide it on its own.

Sandy: No but, what Norm and Chip brought up, I feel the same way. If you don't have the analysis yet to be able to determine it, wouldn't it still fit under a more generalized alternative?

Dan: If I remember, what came from the Forestry committee, the recommendation was (we only discussed 3) to go forward analyzing those 3 alternatives that are 1, 2, and 3 here. The committee hasn't had a chance to vet this #4 as an alternative. I'm not saying yes or no. I think the committee needs their chance to take a look at how this is folding.

Bob: I think, that analysis could go on with the alternatives we already have. Like Patty was saying, you have to do your analysis out there before you know what your impacts are and the risks both ways and what they are. I don't see why it needs to be a separate alternative.

Kennon: is Placer Creek road a known source of sediment to Placer Creek or is it being assumed that's the source of sediment?

Kevin: During the Kriest project, failures were noticed that deposited soil into the creek. Those were known deposits of sediment. I don't know aside from failures, if it's source from regular sediment or not, or if it's more a result of small failures that occur. The WEPP (Water Erosion Prediction Project) analysis will give us an idea of that aquatic part. I don't know what the results of that are yet.

Patty: We need to study it; there's no doubt about that. It needs to be fully analyzed and I want to make that really clear. I'm not trying to shy away from the fact that we need to know what's going on with this road, and we need the information to treat it appropriately. I am concerned that if we are including this alternative, we call it Placer Creek Aquatic Habitat Restoration.

Gary Aitken Jr.: from the get-go, we decided to analyze it before we make any decisions and it can still be presented as such.

Patty: Where are we on timeline on getting these alternatives for you guys to be moving ahead?

Kevin: To be honest, we won't be able to really wait; folks will have to start analyzing. But, if they start analyzing the proposed actions, we could decide to "flip-flop" a few things in here and they won't have lost any ground.

Patty: So we could agree to the first 3 and table # 4, and you could bring us information at the June meeting about the ability to do something with that?

Kevin: I think because it's not a real significant change, probably 90% of the stuff at least needs to be analyzed either way.

Kennon: have you looked at relocating alternatives of that road? Relocating that road?

Kevin: yes...

Dan: the committee recommended going forward with the analyzing the 3. We were aware of the 3. Even though, there was discussion, we didn't realize that #4 was going to be an alternative.

Patty: We knew it was going to be fully analyzed

Dan's thought was to go forward with #1, #2, #3; in the meantime find out more about #4. Dan asked the board how that sounded. Nobody was opposed to Dan's recommendation.

Ben Conard: Do you know enough to know that the proposed action has adversity effect on Grizzly Bears?

Kevin: I don't think so, there's no decrease in core or net increase of road density. There's mitigation in terms of seasonal operations, to avoid disturbance.

Patty: and storing some roads to open others.

Ben: I'm concerned about the #2 alternative. It seems like we've gone to considerable trouble with the Forest Plan and design standards that we can have activities in bear habitat and keep it at the insignificant level. Ben asked if it was going to be taken as far as addressing the comment verses a complete avoidance.

Kevin: it also addresses that access comment that in order to do the proposed action, we do have to store segments of 2 other roads. There was concerns that some comments were to the tune of don't close any roads. If we do that, it addresses those 2 road segments. One is the road and its entirety and the other is about 2/3rds of the road.

Norm: the units that are being looked at for harvest are security core. So to go in there we have to close another road system to offset the security core. Correct me if I'm wrong. There are no units we could get to in bear habitat that wouldn't necessitate some changes in access management.

Ben: so trade-offs to offset.

Patty: Right. We are closing roads in order to do that. We won't be changing net security.

Norm: if you go into those units and log, we have to close these roads to offset mitigation.

Patty: Right. And we are

Ben: If you're meeting the Forest Plan standards, and you're harvesting in Grizzly Bear Habitat, then why do you have an alternative?

Chip: both are alternatives that talk about actions and not the results of what you're desiring on the ground in terms of, in one case whether bears are taken care of or in the other case whether the aquatic systems are taken care of. If you're going to have #2, it would say maximize bear security or something like that. And it might describe this as the alternatives and approach to doing that. #4 you might say, maximize the potential of Placer Creek as an aquatic system and you might list full decommissioning as one possible way to get there. We desire a condition on the landscape; it's the "what" not the "how" that we are interested in. Not that we have to pay attention to the "how," but until we decide the "what" ...

Kevin: to be honest, the alternative is the "how." That's why #4 says decommission, because that's the "how."

Kennon: Are we going to analyze timber harvest and everything else, or are you just looking at the road in #4?

Kevin: It's the same as #1 except for the road.

Kennon: so why don't you just put it in #1 and say that you're going to look at the road with both analysis.

Norm: to help clarify, when you do the analysis you analyze the alternative as a whole. You don't pick it apart. So to have the alternative wrote in and wrote out, that muddies the analysis more than separating them out; having 2 clear alternatives that have exactly the same thing except for one piece missing.

Norm: in putting the bear alternative, I think maybe something Ben was getting at, is that harvesting in Grizzly Bear habitat isn't necessarily a bad thing. But in this situation, what the issue is, is that it's the changing a road management to mitigate for the access. To call it, in Chip's case, maximizing bear security, that name needs to be worked on... Maintain Grizzly Bear status Quo...

Kevin: and really #2, you can have the ability to trade volume for roads.

Chip: The "what" then, in that case, would be access for people as opposed to the "how"? I don't want to belabor; my preference is to see alternatives displayed in a way that tells you what it is that you want to accomplish by what you're going to do, as opposed to how you're going to accomplish it. You want to

analyze an alternative that says, do good things for aquatic habitat above and beyond and analyze decommissioning as part of that as an alternative to a proposed action.

Kevin: The “what” is already analyzed in the purpose and need of the project. The alternatives are what we weigh against one another on our ability to get there (that’s the how do we get there). There will be tradeoffs associated with some of them, to try to get there. In the beginning, when we talked about the existing condition that’s out there, and then we discussed the issues and concerns that we have on the landscape; without that, we don’t have a need to go there. The problem is addressed early on, and that’s the driver for going into the drainage at all. Once there, what’s our purpose for being here? What actions can we take? These alternatives line out the actions and the alternative actions taken. It kind of steps you through it from the document, from beginning to the end.

Gary: it’s an organizational system then...

Kevin: it is. It may not be the way everyone thinks, and it is probably not the way most people address problems. This is a step-by-step process from beginning to end.

Dan: Where in this, for proposed actions, are you going to allow for anything less than decommissioning?

Patty: That’s the whole point. As the committee discussed it, all that had been asked for was to fully analyze the situation. I think where the committee is coming from is, what are the things we could do, or try, and what would the risks associated be, before we move to decommissioning.

Kevin: That’s the question at hand, can we assume both of them in the same alternative and still allow Mary Farnsworth to make the decision either way. That was my question to Dave Cobb this morning. Can we put everything in there and still give people a clear idea of what we’ve got going on so they can comment one side of the other, and also so Mary has decision space. Separating it out, Mary clearly sees what her decision space is. #1 the road would stay open and we would do maintenance, etc., in #4 the road would be decommissioned. It gives her the ability to see her decisions.

Patty: I think we better wrap this up, I would suggest the board send a memo to the FS that says what we support. I think I heard you (the board) say that you agree with moving ahead on the first 3. We would suggest on #2 some terminology that talks about maximizing bear security. And the other 2 I’m assuming are fine, they’re very straight forward. On the 4th one, we’ll convey we are waiting for Kevin to have a chance to meet Forest NEPA folks and clarify for us.

Everyone agreed to that. Patty will prepare a memo, have everyone look at it, then have the co-chairs sign it.

Correspondence:

Patty announced that the Hellroaring Letter went out publically on May 9th; the comment period ends June 22nd.

Presentations:

Kootenai Tribe Loon Monitoring- Norm Merz:

Norm wanted to give an update on the Common Loon here in Boundary County. Norm worked on monitoring them in Montana before coming to Bonners Ferry.

Loon facts:

- Typically black and white; however, the Sub-adults are brown with a sharp beak and red eyes.
- Grebes, Mergansers, and Cormorants are commonly mistaken for Loons.
- Loons are long lived species, living up to 25 years.
- About ¾ the size of a goose.
- Loons have solid bones; making them heavy.
- Wing span about half to 60% of a goose.
- Legs are located in the back of the body
 - Great for swimming
 - Not good for being on land; only on land to mate & incubate.
- Migration: loons show up in April and leave around October. The pairs migrate before the young. After about 3 years, the young Loons will return within 20 miles of the natal lake.
- Reproduction:
 - Around 7 years old
 - Normally around 2 eggs, 1 egg if they have to re-nest
 - Incubation- 26-29 days
 - Hatch late May- early June, early July for re-nests.
- Habitat:
 - Lakes > 13 acres (generally because they need room to take off)
 - Ample amount of fish, amphibs, and invertebrates.
 - Nest on small islands, herbaceous shorelines
 - Shallow coves for raising their young.

Western US Loon populations:

- Northwest Montana (Largest population) on Average:
 - 62 breeding pairs/year
 - 41 chicks/year
 - 53 singles
 - Banding (2003-current)
 - 233 birds banded as of last year.
 - 39 deaths of banded Loons
- Eastern Washington
 - 10 lakes with established territories
- North Idaho
 - Sporadic observations
 - Last documented chicks- 1985 (MacArthur Lake), may have been some chicks on Bonner lake in the late 1990's.

Summary Update:

- 2007 & 2009- a couple single birds showed up (Kootenai River).
- 2010- started more formalized surveys
- 2011- found 1 single and then 1 pair at Bonner Lake. Also found 1 pair and then 1 single at Herman Lake. Figures Bonner, Herman and Perkins to be 1 territory. If there's a pair of Loons, they are moving around between those 3 lakes.
- 2012- Nest found at Herman Lake.

Found a pair in 2012 on Herman Lake. May 2012 the lake level went up (because of rain); likely flooding the nest. Later that year, the pair moved to Bonner Lake. 2014 a nest was discovered on Bonner Lake. Later that year nest failed. A resident of Bonner Lake, found a dead banded Loon washed up on the shore. Lead sinkers were found in the gizzard of the bird; given the condition of the bird and the presence of lead, it probably died of lead poisoning.

Conservation:

- Common Loons:
 - Give them space
 - Be aware that they may prey on your lures
 - Wrap up loose fishing line
 - Use non-lead fishing tackle (Norm had samples for the taking)
- Nesting Loons & Chicks
 - Give them space
 - Do not approach nests
 - Reduce wakes

The presentation ended with a “Looney” ending.

Fishing line and Loons don’t mix. Norm has rescued several Loons at Flathead Lake. The fishing line gets into their feathers and creates a tight mess. Please pick up your fishing line.

It was asked... Montana seems to have a healthy Loon population, what’s different? Are other mortalities a mixture of things, or is lead figured prominently in most? Norm answered that in our case, the bird was examined soon enough for diagnosis. As far as population, Montana has larger and more lakes, has worked hard to educate boaters in giving Loons space, and in some cases use nest platforms.

Sturgeon Film- “Fish Between the Falls”:

There was not enough time for the movie. The group agreed to postpone for another time. The movie will be broadcasted on Montana Public Television (June 5th @ 8 p.m), it is available at montanapbs.org, and is available on Amazon Prime.

2015 Libby Dam Sturgeon Flow and Flood Risk Management- Greg Hoffman:

Greg gave a brief update on the water supply forecast and informed the group on 2015 Sturgeon Flow.

This year’s snow pack, in the entire Columbia River Basin, is dry compared to last May 2014

Corps water supply forecast for Libby Dam/Lake Koocanusa:

- Inflow Forecast- April thru August is still 92% of normal
- Forecast thru the year is hanging around normal (despite the snow pack)

Natural Resources Conservation Service: Snow- precipitation update (Tuesday May 12th):

- Montana- Kootenai River Basin total precipitation about 95%
- Idaho- Northern Panhandle Region total precipitation about 93%
- Snow water equivalent is less than 30% in both Basins.
- Precipitation is what’s driving the Corps’ formulas.

The Dalles Dam:

- Forecast of The Dalles Dam is the driver for managing the reservoir and for the entire Columbia River System.
- The May forecast at the Dalles dropped below 71% or 62.4 million acre feet; calling for “Dry Year” operations for the Columbia River Basin.

Libby Dam Operation for “Dry Year”:

Full pool at Libby Dam is 2459

- Normal year- draft Kootenai Reservoir to elevation 2449 by the end of September.
- “Dry Year”- draft to elevation 2439 by the end of September.
- The Kootenai Tribe of Idaho’s System Operation Request is for 6,000 cfs flows during September and October in order to complete instream habitat work.
- In order to provide this flow, the Corps will draft the reservoir to 2439 by the end of August rather than by the end of September, making the operation “volume neutral” to the salmon managers in the mainstem Columbia River.
- After the sturgeon volume is expended, Kootenai River flow will come down to a summer flat flow of 12 kcfs to 14 kcfs all summer. Down to 6 kcfs by the 1st of September.

Patty asked what it’s going to do for recreation on the lake. For example, places like Lake Kootenai. Greg said it will have an impact.

The water managers are not comfortable with being over 2420 in April, they want that storage space available in order to avoid a “fill and spill” operation similar to 2012 and other recent years.

Greg asked if there were any questions...

Sturgeon:

- The Corps tries to recreate that “sweet spot” with flow and temperature, with the river slowly warming as the flows come down, ideally in early to mid-June.
- This year it looks like it is happening 2 to 3 weeks earlier than normal.
- The thermocline in the reservoir is 110 feet below the surface, which is really early. Thermocline is when the water temperature above the water temperature changes rapidly in a particular zone, with an obvious “layer” of warm water above and cold water below. Typically, this time of year the water temperature is mixed with no thermocline. It’s a couple weeks early this year.
- Sturgeon flows will start next Tuesday.
- 25 kcfs for 7 days will be put out. This is at least 2 weeks early.

Greg constructed a time series graph that moved from 2006-2014. The graph displayed the Kootenai elevation, Libby Dam flow and Kootenai inflow throughout that time period.

Closing Comments/Meeting Announcements:

The Libby Annual Meeting is May 28th at 7p.m., located at Kootenai River Inn.

Next meeting will be June 22nd.

Ben Conard will be taking a “mirror” position in Montana, last day will be July 10th. Expression of appreciation and thanks were given to Ben and for being so faithful to the collaboration. Ben said that the State Supervisor is committed to the philosophy and relationship that has been built. The Supervisor would like to look aggressively to fill Ben’s position within this next year. Patty made a

comment to that, "Ben has done an amazing job of turning around the staff attitude, the ability for the office to succeed, the timeliness and addressing issues, and the response to public concerns and cares, the way they've dealt with issues publically, forthright and in a transparent manner. It's like night and day and it's probably an understatement to say we are going to miss you a lot. I'm jealous of the folks and whatever you're going to do next. You've done an amazing job."

Sid- the Jasper Mountain decision was signed today. This was the 1st categorical exclusion authority under the Farm Bill (passed last year) on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest.

-The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee will hold a hearing this week on the Boulder-White Clouds Wilderness. The Senate Subcommittee will hold Congressman Simpson's bill. Idaho Conservation League will testify in favor of the bill.

-Patty asked if there is any starting of writing the language for Scotchman's Peak Wilderness. Sid doesn't believe that, that has started yet. He does know that Phil Hough, Brad Smith and Kate McAllister are in DC having conversation with Delegation.

Karen- Sen. Crapo was #1 in the amount of Town halls that he did in the country for all the Senate and the House.

Judy- Last week Sen. Labrador, reintroduced the bill for getting young people approved for working the Forest as long as they were supervised by their parents. Community Forest trust Bill came across this week.

Gary- Burbot are doing well. 1st release of approximately 400,000 Burbot in the river today.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:53 p.m.
Shandee Alexander
KTOI/KVRI Admin. Assistant